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in Early
Communist Transition

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A Chinese Village in Early Communist Transition

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Preface and Acknowledgments

In China today some 80 per cent, or 500,000,000 of the country's 600,000,000 people, still make their living from agriculture, and most of these teeming millions of tillers of the soil are grouped into some 1,000,000 peasant villages. A compact group of houses hugging some winding streets, a population from a few scores to several thousand, and a broad enveloping belt of open fields — these are the physical components of the peasant village, in which flows a life of simplicity, hardship, and stability, but in which also brew forces that have toppled dynasties when miseries in agrarian life became humanly unbearable and uncontrollably widespread. It is now well recognized that it was the strength of such forces that carried the Communist revolution to its initial victory. What goes on within these seemingly simple peasant communities is likely to remain a vital factor affecting the social transformation of this ancient land.

It is the purpose of this volume to try to understand the problems of one of the innumerable Chinese peasant villages by analyzing its pre-Communist pattern of life and studying the changes that the Communist revolution has wrought. The emphasis here is on an analytical presentation of the major aspects of village life and recent changes in them, not on the formulation of a body of abstract principles governing the structure and functions of the present village.

In this study the village community is conceived of as an aggregate of peasant population nucleated in a compact settlement and integrated into functional groups by a system of institutions. Our focus is on the system of institutions and the related configuration of social groups in the village, particular emphasis being placed on the functional interdependence between different aspects of life which gives rise to the complex interrelationship among the institutions. Such interrelationship is seen in the overlapping membership of such social groups as the peasant farm organization, the family, and the local power groups. Through this network of institutional interdependence the individuals and groups operate together as a consistent system and the village community develops a functional unity.

While the functional unity of the institutions and the social groups makes the village a distinct entity, it does not isolate the village from social and cultural ties with the regional and national community.

Being a part of a complex civilization and a component of a state, as Robert Redfield points out (*Peasant Society and Culture,* Chicago, 1956, chapters i and ii), the peasant village receives influence from and reacts to developments in the greater communities of the surrounding region and the nation. Cognizance of the interrelationship between the village and the greater community is vital to the understanding of both the village's traditional pattern of life and its recent upheavals. Without the national influences the peasantry would not have developed and maintained the highly sophisticated Confucian ideology so vital to the operation of the village social order; the Communist revolution was not automatically generated within the peasant villages.

Our analysis of one village located in the suburban area of a southern city has its obvious limitations as a reflection of the broad problems of rural China in both the pre-Communist and the Communist periods. As a vast and geographically variegated country with only a primitive system of transportation and communication in the past centuries, China has long bred profound localism and regionalism in different sections of the country. The representative character of one village is severely restricted by prominent local differences. But the significance of sample studies is by no means diminished. A necessary step in understanding a country divided by localism is to establish the local types; and adequate study of each divergent part is an obvious requisite for proper understanding of the whole. Hence there is typological significance in the present study of a representative of southern suburban villages.

A suburban village is characterized by its proximity to the city market and its susceptibility to urban social and political influences. With the rapid development of modern means of transportation and communication, especially under the organized efforts of the Communists, urban economic, social, and political influences are being brought nearer to an increasing number of outlying villages, a condition which tends to extend some of the characteristics of the suburban village to the interior rural communities and to increase the representative significance of the recent changes pictured in our sample. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the national components of the village culture and organization which impart universal significance to many aspects of our sample. Examples of such components include the gentry leadership and the Confucian ideology in the pre-Communist period and the national uniformity of a large proportion of the Communist devices being instituted into the village life.

Nevertheless, the presence of local characteristics is kept in view in the analysis of our village. Effort is made in this volume to point out whether, so far as we can observe, certain aspects of life in the village are unique to the locality or common to other parts of China. Whenever data are available, conditions in this village are compared with those in other localities in order to increase the usefulness of this particular sample in the interpretation of China's national problems.

This study originated in 1948 as a field-work device to acquaint students in sociology courses with social reality. Sending the students to study various aspects of life in a village small enough to be manageable within limited research resources served as a live demonstration of sociological concepts from characteristics of population aggregates to the functioning of the institutional framework of a community. Our field work lasted from 1948 to 1951. When the Communists took over the territory in October 1949, we had covered one year of the village under Nationalist rule. After the Communists' arrival, field investigation became increasingly hazardous and difficult. Since we had reported the project to the subdistrict government ruling that village, we were permitted to continue our work, although with reduced intensity. Since 1951 our information has been gleaned from the Communist and non-Communist press. The Chinese press in Hong Kong contains considerable information about the general locality in which our village is located; and, although such press reports do not concern our particular village directly, they reveal conditions in many neighboring communities which serve as a close reflection of possible developments in our village. Also, since our field work terminated in 1951, we turned to the Communist and non-Communist press for national and regional information concerning the important subject of collectivization in order to present the general picture of a drastic change of which our village is a part.

Although Communist regulations compelled us to leave the entire written record of the field investigation in Communist China, the field information in this volume was reproduced from memory in 1952, when impressions of the three years of continuous contacts with the village life were still fresh. The writer is confident that important events and significant situations as presented here are faithful to reality. There are, however, certain limitations on the accuracy of statistical data. The over-all figures, such as the total acreage of land and the total number of persons and families in the village, are well remembered, but subdivisions of these figures and other statistical details are retained in memory only in terms of general proportions. Where such quantitative data are needed for tracing out a statistical pattern, our findings are stated in approximate proportions or percentages, and actual figures are deduced from them. These figures have been checked against comparable figures available for neighboring villages and the surrounding districts, and against regional and national averages found in the Communist and non-Communist press. The names of the persons and the village are fictitious, but the general location of the site and the social situations and concrete events are factual.

The handling of Chinese units of weights and measures and value presents some difficulties. In measurement, one acre is equivalent to 6.6 mow. In weight, the local unit is the traditional catty (*ssu ma chin*), which is equivalent to 1.33 pounds. Whenever convenient, the English equivalent is given in the text. The matter of monetary unit before 1954 offers an almost insurmountable difficulty owing to the unbridled inflation in the postwar period. In the rural districts, and even in the cities, the people had become inflation-wise in those years and used the weight of unhusked rice as the standard of commodity values in preference to the astronomical and daily fluctuating figures of the paper currency. Thus the price for a day's farm labor or for a boatload of fertilizer was quoted in so many catties of unhusked rice. From the fall of 1950 on, the Communist government succeeded in harnessing the inflation and effected stability in its currency, but the astronomical figures were inconvenient to use in this study. The new Communist yuan after 1954 returned the monetary unit to the small denominations comparable to the prewar currency. In 1957 one United States dollar was exchanged for about 2.60 yuan in the Hong Kong market, and this rate of exchange is used in this study.

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PART I

The Pre-Communist Village

CHAPTER I

The Village of Nanching

THE SITE of our study, Nanching (literally, the Scene of the South), is located in the vicinity of Canton, the capital city of Kwangtung Province, near the northern edge of the rich Pearl River Delta. The natural and human environment of this village partake of the characteristics of its broader regional setting.

Climatically, Kwangtung Province is a part of tropical China, and the village is a little over twenty miles south of the Tropic of Cancer. Here "the year may be divided into three seasons. There is a long wet summer with excessive humidity and considerable heat from the middle of April to the middle of October, then a relatively dry, cool winter with pleasant days to the middle of February, followed by two months of transition with foggy and muggy weather." [1] In the vicinity of Canton, the average temperature during the coolest months of December, January, and February rests in the upper fifties (degrees Fahrenheit), and it rises to the upper eighties and lower nineties during the hot months of June, July, and August. Although the average summer temperature is not too high, the excessive humidity makes the heat extremely uncomfortable. The winter is so mild that killing frost is uncommon, and snow is unknown to the inhabitants of Nanching.[2]

Precipitation is derived from the monsoon and occasional typhoons from the ocean to the south. The province is one of the wettest in China, and the total annual rainfall in the vicinity of Nanching is about 66 inches. Therefore the growing season for Nanching extends throughout the year, permitting the maturation of many crops. Abundance of precipitation makes it suitable for the planting of rice as the main crop, putting the village community into the rice region of China.

Topographically, Kwangtung is a mountainous province of the South China coast where, according to the Liangkwang Geological

Survey, less than a third of the land is cultivable and less than one sixth of the area is under cultivation. That survey would set the cultivated area of the province at 17.7 per cent, which is the average for China's rice region,[3] as against 19.6 per cent for China as a whole. A report of the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce put the cultivated land of this region as low as 8 per cent of the total area.[4] The population of the province in 1951 was estimated to be 26,000,000,[5] giving an average density of 285 persons per square mile for the province as a whole and 3,494 persons per square mile of crop area.[6] The heavy pressure of the man-land ratio upon the livelihood of the people in this region is obvious.

Our Nanching village is located in the Pearl River Delta, where flat cultivable land is more abundant than anywhere else in the entire province. The delta is an alluvial plain of 2,890 square miles, of which about three-fourths are arable. The general population density for this delta land reaches "the amazing concentration of 3,100 people for every square mile." [7] The delta is made up of numerous low hills of red sandstone enveloped by podzolized red earth, which is a red acid soil of low native fertility with strongly expressed horizons of eluviation and illuviation of clays.[8] Nevertheless, because of the hot climate and heavy rain, and because of the intensive fertilization, the soil is made to provide a multi-crop agricultural economy for the support of its population.

In spite of the heavy population pressure, the province as a whole and the Pearl River Delta in particular have escaped the catastrophic famines which periodically befall many localities of North China. The abundance of precipitation and the year-round growing season have at least provided subsistence for the majority of the local population, and the local history of Panyü county, in which the village of Nanching is located, discloses no record of famine for the past two hundred and fifty years.[9] There have been individual cases of starvation due to crop failure, and peasant riots caused by food shortages have occurred; but on the whole, human catastrophes such as destruction from war and exploitation by economic classes, rather than natural calamities such as drought or floods, have been the historic causes of widespread misery and death. Compared to many other parts of China, it must be said that the regional setting of Nanching is "generously endowed by Heaven."

Economically, the province is characterized by a high degree of urbanization. In addition to Canton with its population of about 1,250,000 in 1948 and 1,789,000 in 1957, as announced by the Office of

Population Investigation of the Canton Municipal People's Council on November 5, 1957, there are at least twelve towns with over 100,000 population, and a large number of smaller ones. The fact that the nonfarming population is about 33 per cent of the province's total population, compared to about 27 per cent for China as a whole,[10] reflects the high development of commerce and native industry in the province. In its agricultural economy, Kwangtung historically ranked among the highest in tenancy, with over 40 per cent of its peasants belonging to the tenant class, compared to 20 per cent for North China.[11] Access to the ocean, the greater development of commerce and industry, and the high percentage of tenancy were correlated factors that affected the life of the people.

Cultural and political isolation has long been a characteristic ascribed to this province by students of Chinese history and geography. True, the province is fenced off by a barrier of mountains in the north and the Pacific Ocean to the south. Historically, it was the southern frontier set apart from the other provinces of China. Politically, the central authority of Peking was thinned to a negligible degree when it reached down here by way of the extended lines of primitive transportation through difficult mountain passes. It was a popular ground to which exiles were banished from the imperial court, and it was frequently a haven for political refugees escaping from wars and dynastic purges of the northern centers of power struggle. Political integration of the territory with the central government was not effectively tightened until the seventeenth or even the eighteenth century.

Even in modern times the political autonomy of the territory, particularly in the mountainous countryside, has always been stronger than in many other parts of China. All of the major modern revolutions have originated here. The Taiping Rebellion and the Hundred-Days Reform of the nineteenth century, the Republican revolution of 1911, the Second Revolution that led to the establishment of the Nationalist government, the Canton Commune, and the first "red area" of Haifeng and Lufeng in southern Kwangtung Province in the 1920's, which pioneered the present Communist revolution – all can be traced back to this general territory. It is true that once the revolutionary movements marched off to the main stage in the North, as they all inevitably did, Kwangtung Province would become the backwash of the revolutionary tide; but its comparative quietness and relative isolation from the main stage of power struggle would give it a chance to nurse another revolution so long as restive forces continued to operate.

Among the prominent factors in this situation are the mountains, which blocked political authority from the north, and access to the ocean to the south, which made possible contact with revolutionary ideas from foreign lands at the same time that it stimulated commerce and industry. The same factors helped to mold many other cultural and social phenomena more or less peculiar to this territory. The people in this province speak dialects different from Mandarin, the major vernacular of China, although they use the universal system of Chinese written language. They have cultivated many local folkways and mores not common in other sections of the country. Their clannish kinship system is stronger than that in most sections of China. They have sent millions of their sons to the "South Seas" (Southeast Asia), to America, Australia, and Europe, making Kwangtung the leading emigrant province.

But these items of local color should not obscure the fact that the political and economic life of the province has always flowed in the general bloodstream that circulates inside China as a whole, and that its local institutions rest upon the foundation of a national culture, including a national historical tradition, common to all parts of the country where the Chinese people dominate. Local restive forces, such as the peasants' problem of land ownership and the issue of modernizing traditional political and social institutions, have been parts of the national current; and the revolutions hatched locally eventually merged into the national scene, making local autonomy perform an incubating function for nationwide developments. The commercial and industrial developments in this province, and the remittances from its emigrants, have played a part in China's domestic economy and in the balance of her international trade. The divergent dialects that the people speak represent only different ways of pronouncing the same words commonly used in other parts of the country. The exceptionally strong development of the clan organization has operated on the kinship principles of Confucianism, nationally accepted for the guidance of kinship relations. The relatively marked development of a progressive and individualistic outlook, a characteristic commonly ascribed to the people of this province, has been subject to the control of the integrative values of the kinship system and social stratification, both of which followed the common pattern of China as a whole.

These characteristics of the national culture and the local variations are all ingrained in the life of the village community of Nanching.

Nanching is about five miles from the city of Canton, the political capital and the economic center of the province. Before 1936 the village was connected to the city only by dirt paths and short stretches of paths paved with large stone slabs. These paths, still in use in 1951, were generally less than five and sometimes only about two feet wide. All were too narrow for vehicle transportation; for, since animals of burden were not used in Nanching, probably due to the lack of pasture land to feed them, all land transportation was by human carriers using the carrying pole. The village is about a mile from the Pearl River, on the other side of which lies Canton city. A small stream connects the village with the Pearl River, but since the stream winds in a loop of about three and a half miles before reaching the river, direct water transportation from the village to the city was seldom used except for bulky cargo like fertilizer. Studies made elsewhere in China have shown that among all native modes of transportation the most expensive is the human carrier and the least expensive is water transportation, and that short-distance transportation to local markets using human carriers costs more per unit-distance than long-distance transportation to primary markets using animal and water conveyances.[12]

The short distance to the city, to which a round trip could be made by foot in half a day, has always subjected Nanching to many urban influences, such as the commercialization of agriculture, but over a long period the costliness of using human carriers limited the full operation of these influences and prevented the complete incorporation of the village's economy into the city economy. Consequently, the village was able to preserve its own identity as an agricultural community with a significant degree of self-sufficiency from the soil. This was especially so some decades ago. When the writer visited the village several times during the years 1924–1926, the life of the community appeared to be completely rural in character, with very little visible trace of urban influence.

But the influence of the city crept in steadily. In the late 1920's the commercial and industrial development of Canton was accelerated, and the use of mechanical transportation steadily increased. A motor road built through the edge of the village now connects it with the city and the surrounding territory, and in 1951 a regular bus service operated, with a station just outside the village gate, charging a fare low enough for the villagers to pay. During harvesting seasons trucks came to the village at regular intervals to transport locally grown produce to the city for individual peasants who paid by every 100 catties of weight, the peasant riding free. In addition, motor launches had come into operation between the city and a village on the bank of the Pearl River, and villagers from Nanching and the surrounding communities rode on them and used them to transport produce to the city. Both passenger and cargo traffic were facilitated by the greater speed and lower costs, but the use of human carriers was still common in 1951, for the profit from agriculture was so low that the peasants frequently could not afford even the lowered cost of mechanical transportation or any other form of transportation which took money out of their meager earnings.

Once in the city, the Nanching peasant and his produce had access to transportation and communication to the other provinces of China as well as to the outside world. To the north of the city the Canton – Hankow Railroad in 1937 tunneled through the mountain passes where human carriers used to struggle over the narrow paths on precipitous slopes of towering peaks, and this line linked the city with railway systems in other parts of China. One could go to Shanghai in three and a half days and to Peking in five. At high tide coastal steamers under 3,000 tons connected the city directly with all coastal cities of China. Some eighty miles to the south lies the great commercial center of Hong Kong, connected with Canton by both railroad and steamer, and from Hong Kong modern transportation and communication were available to all parts of the world. Villagers from Nanching could go to Hong Kong well within a day; and goods could be transported almost as fast. Through these arteries of transportation and communication flowed economic and social influences from the outside world into the village life of Nanching.

About half a mile east of Nanching is the little market town of Pingan Chen with approximately 2,500 population in 1950. It had a town market that met every five days where the surrounding villagers came to buy and sell. There were about forty stores selling such daily necessities as groceries, dry goods, cotton, baskets, and bamboo articles. A small group of industries included two machine mills milling rice for the peasants, three or four small handweaving factories turning out cloth of a coarse grade, three masonry and carpentry shops doing construction and repair work for the surrounding villages, and two bamboo shops weaving bamboo strips into baskets and other articles. The town also had one large and two small tea houses which sold food to the marketing people, and more important, served as social centers for the more prosperous villagers within a radius of about two miles. The town was also a little local political center, for located here was the office of the ch'ü, a subdistrict government of the Canton municipal authority, administering the public affairs of the surrounding villages, including Nanching.

This market town supplied the bulk of Nanching's immediate commercial needs. The rice stores and the rice mills also bought a sizable proportion of Nanching's rice for shipment to Canton. Some of the pigs raised in the village were sold to the two meat stores in the town. The periodic market performed the functions of supplying the surrounding population with food and miscellaneous articles and providing the peasants with an opportunity to sell their produce, eggs, and poultry directly to consumers. Thus, economically, the town with its market provided a trading center for the local population and a transmitting point for the flow of goods and finances between Canton and Nanching, for from Canton the town bought its stock and to Canton it sent its goods collected from the countryside. So, indirectly, the economic influence of Canton was brought to the very door of Nanching.

Part of this influence was expressed in the high price of agricultural land in Nanching, in the heavy population the land supported, and in the high percentage of tenancy, as will be discussed later. Before Communism it was a nationwide characteristic of China that agricultural land in the vicinity of large cities commanded a premium price. Besides its proximity to the city, Nanching has a favorable location in the delta. Floods from heavy spring and summer rains pose a frequent threat in the Pearl River Delta, where most of the land is low and subjected to frequent inundation by the rising river. Many of the fields of the alluvial plain have been reclaimed from the shallow mud flats along the river bank by dikes, and in the past every year large numbers of weak dikes were broken by raging currents, causing extensive damage to the fields. But the land of Nanching and its vicinity is just high enough to escape flooding without being so high as to suffer from a lack of irrigation water. The alluvial soil is good, and with intensive fertilization, can be made to produce heavy crops with reliable harvests which enjoy a nearby market.

In terms of its principal characteristics and problems, Nanching at the time our study was made was typical of the villages near large southern cities in the pre-Communist period. That Nanching, despite its proximity to the city, retained its identity as an agricultural community deriving its livelihood primarily from the soil was fully evident from a panorama of the local scene. If the locality were visited in May or June, when the pouring rains had mitigated, one would see the surrounding countryside as a deep green carpet of thriving crops interspersed with trees and villages, villages that lay one or at most two miles apart. It was a thickly settled land in which stood the compact group of houses that was the village of Nanching in 1951.

There were about two hundred houses altogether, tightly grouped to form a well-defined outline roughly the shape of a T. Enveloping the houses was a broad belt of open land consisting of paddy fields and vegetable gardens, which were partitioned into numerous tiny patches by low banks of packed earth and crisscrossed by irrigation ditches flanked by dikes, also of packed earth. Along the dikes and some of the low partition banks tropical fruit trees such as lichee, guava, and peach had been planted. Amidst the low-lying fields there were occasional patches of higher land covered with more fruit trees, and nestled among the trees were one or two scattered farm houses. About thirty small ponds, some lying close to the edge of the village site, were scattered through the fields. These ponds, located on low ground where rain water collected, supplied the needs of the villagers in their daily life as well as part of the irrigation water for the fields. A more important source of water was the stream that ran along the southern and eastern boundary of the village's fields. One branch of this stream meandered through the fields into the village, and at high tide small boats and junks could be rowed into the heart of the village.

From the low land along the main stream the ground gradually rose toward the west and the north until it merged into the low hills of red earth that formed the western and northern boundaries of the village's fields. The rising land was terraced into fields, and where it was too high for water to reach, it was used for pasturing and as burial grounds. Studding the hillsides were numerous graves, some old and some new, some with elaborate tombs, but most of them indicated by simple stone markers. From this semicircle of hillside the spirits of the dead ancestors could watch their descendants living in the village where they once lived, working in the fields where they once worked, and struggling with the natural and human forces with which they too had contended for nearly a thousand years.

The village houses, the enveloping fields and vegetable gardens, the ponds and ditches and the streams, the interspersed fruit trees, and the graves on the hills wove out a picture that the Chinese for centuries have come to call "*t'ien, yuan, lu, mo*" (fields, gardens, houses, graves), a classical expression signifying "homeland" or the roots of life. These were the primary elements in which the deep and continuous roots of the community life of Nanching were anchored. With these elements the community became a place where people were born, struggled for sustenance, and died, leaving behind descendants to carry on the recurring cycle. And the village became the *ku hsiang,* "the old homeland" with which the traditional Chinese identified the material interest and sentimental attachment of his entire social existence. It is plain that such a community as Nanching was not the result of a sudden conglomeration of immigrants from many sources. Rather, it was the product of a centuries-old process of marriage and reproduction on the same plot of land, and the foundation of the community organization rested on the tightly knit kinship group.

Nanching was composed mainly of two large clans, the Wong clan and the Lee clan, which together claimed the overwhelming majority of the village population and dominated the affairs of the community. In addition, there were three minor clans, the Chen clan, the Chang clan, and the Ho clan, each of which was numerically small, all occupying the eastern periphery of the village. Although the minor clans had little or no voice in community affairs, they were recognized as established and integral parts of the village. Thus, characteristically, this was a multi-clan village. Aside from the members of the clans, Nanching had a few families and individuals of other surnames who were temporary residents of the village or agricultural laborers from outside, none of whom owned land or a house in the village, and all of whom were regarded by the villagers as "floating elements," "sojourners," or "guests" whose roots of life did not belong there. Above all, the basic groups that made up the village were biological in character, bound by common origin and marriage and defined by patrilineal surnames, and membership in them was not open to subscription. Hence, as a general rule, the village as a unit of permanent community life was closed to outsiders.

Between members of different clans there was a clear demarcation, expressed not only in the independent centers of life within each clan and the inter-clan rivalry which was alive in practically everyone's mind, but also, and visibly, in the separation of living quarters within the village grounds. The Wong clan occupied the western half of the village, the Lee clan occupied the eastern half, and the three minor clans built their houses on the eastern edge. There were gates on the village streets separating the territories of the Wong and the Lee clans. The Ho clan had a gate on the main village street demarcating its own quarters, and each of the other two minor clans lived on its own street but without a separating gate. Each branch within a clan also had its own street, not always marked off by a gate. Thus the physical plan of the village was blocked out into many individual cells on a kinship basis. It is important to note that there was no clear demarcation between the fields of the clans, although there was a general concentration in one place of land that belonged to members of one clan; and there was buying and renting of land between members of different clans.

There is no accurate account of how far back the biological root of life in Nanching can be traced. There seems to have been an ecological succession of clans in the community. Old villagers said that in the dim past there was a Hua clan and a Fang clan who inhabited the northern end of the present village site. Apparently both of them were crowded out by the late comers, and there were no descendants of either clan in the village. The Lees were the oldest of the living groups in 1951. The ancestral tablets of the most recent dead in the Lee's ancestral hall showed the inscription of the forty-second generation from the first ancestor who came to settle in the village, and the Lee's genealogy showed that the first ancestor made his home here in the year 1091.[13] Since the most recent dead of the Wong clan were recorded as members of the thirty-seventh generation from the first settler, and there was no genealogical record available, it seemed possible that this clan came about one hundred years after the Lee clan. The minor clans came later.

Settlement of this village by the Wongs and the Lees took place at a time when the Chinese dynasty of Sung was hard pressed by northern invaders, particularly the Mongols, and large numbers of Chinese sought refuge in the mountainous frontier of Kwangtung Province. As the Lee's genealogy traced their original home to Chu Lu county of the present Hopei Province of North China, it is fully possible that their ancestors were among the refugees trekking south during the tragic years of the Sung period. The Wongs came from the southern part of Shensi Province of North China, according to the old members of that clan, but no further details were known. Nevertheless, coming from North China, here they settled, worked the land, and multiplied for over eight centuries. As they multiplied, and as surrounding settlements closed in, they built dikes and filled in the shallow and rapidly silting river banks to create more land. In 1951 the southwestern section of the village's fields was a solid piece of well-cultivated land where once were piers where boats used to dock. The latest action in building land from the river took place in 1936, carrying on the ceaseless struggle between multiplying man and niggardly nature.

There is little doubt that the early settlers once had to face the pressure of indigenous aboriginals, for as late as the fifteenth century one of the ancestors of the Lee clan was decorated by the local government for a successful fight against the Miao tribes in the neighborhood. But this phase of the settlement had been deeply buried in the past, leaving no visible effect on the current life of the community. Whatever alien influence Nanching may have been subjected to in the past, its mode of life and culture were Chinese in character, having been modified only to adapt itself to the exigencies of local conditions. This could be seen in the prominence of the ancestral halls that dominated all other buildings of the village, in the annual routine of work and recreation guided by the nationally used almanac (*t'ung shu* or *li shu*), in the traditional system of national values that helped bring up the young and determined the life outlook of the old. These were the national as well as the local roots of the community life of Nanching.

Our study of this Chinese village focuses on a time when for over half a century Nanching had been subjected to the strains and stresses of a changing world, but its people were still imbued with faith in their ancient system of life.

In a public bus plying between Nanching and Canton there was a sign painted immediately above the windows: "In case of accident, each rests with his own fate." That bus, a product of modern science and industrialism, was operated not according to a compatible rationalism which included such things as accident insurance, adequate mechanical inspection, and safety rules, but in the spirit of the ancient Chinese trust in fate. In a sense, that bus symbolized the situation in Nanching. The villagers by and large still embraced "fate" as a guide to their mental outlook, particularly in life's main crises. Fate was the most common explanation for their birth as a male or female, for the prominence or lowliness of their social situation, for the life or death of their parents and siblings, for the state of their own marriage, for the success or failure of their enterprise, for the joy or sorrow of their personal circumstances, as well as for their encounter with the greater forces such as wars, banditry, or floods. A large proportion of the adults still consulted geomancers and fortune tellers for a glimpse of their veiled "fate."

While there is a whole range of interpretations of such mysticism, the old concept of fate may be viewed as faith in the framework of the traditional Chinese culture with its strength undergirded by supernatural beliefs. This concept cannot be divorced from the concrete content of the traditional culture.

Disregarding the supernatural part for the moment, the villagers' deep faith in fate disclosed that the community life of Nanching was still deeply rooted in the traditional culture at a time in modern history when that culture was about to be subjected to the full force of Communism — that is, to an unprecedented revolutionary impact. It is the basic fact of historical climax that underlies all that follows here in our examination of a typical southern suburban Chinese village in transition.

CHAPTER II

Population Composition

Population and land are primary factors affecting the mode of life and its course of development in an agrarian community. Since this was especially true in Nanching, where the people's existence rested almost completely on the extraction of a livelihood from the soil with hand labor, the factor of land will be the subject of treatment for several subsequent chapters. Here we shall consider the size and composition of the village's population, the family as the basic unit of population, and the population as a working force based on the family as a primary working team.

Size, Density, and General Characteristics of the Local Population

In 1948 the population of Nanching was about 1,100 persons, divided into about 230 households. By 1951 about twenty people had been added to the village population, but the majority of these were emigrants who had returned to the village because of current disturbances in the cities; it was doubtful whether they would stay in the village permanently, the custom being for a Chinese to return to his native village only as a temporary haven when deprived of his livelihood in the city. Therefore, the figures of 1,100 persons and 230 families were still representative of the general situation and are used throughout this study.

The total area of the village land, exclusive of the village site, was approximately 1,400 mow or 233 acres, of which about 1,200 mow or a little less than 200 acres were crop land. There was, then, a general density of 3,200 persons per square mile of land owned by the villagers and a specific density of 3,520 persons per square mile of crop land. Taking 1,100 as the basic population figure, there was 1.08 mow or about one-sixth of an acre of crop land per capita. This seems to be in harmony with the general regional setting, particularly that of the

Pearl River Delta, for it compares closely with the figures of 3,495 people per square mile of crop land, with an average of 1.1 mow per capita for the Liangkwang region, and 3,100 people per square mile for the entire area of the delta, as mentioned by Cressey.[1] The population pressure here is apparent. But it is important to bear in mind that the pressure of the man-land ratio upon the actual life of the village operated through social institutions, especially that governing the ownership and use of land.

In the village's population males somewhat outnumbered females in the approximate ratio of 110:100 for all ages. This ratio was fairly normal for the populations of villages near large cities in many other parts of China.[2] The lower number of females is explained primarily by the higher death rate for female babies due to the great value placed upon male babies by the Chinese kinship system.[3]

In Nanching one found the same high value placed upon male babies, which led to negligence in caring for female babies in their most vulnerable period of life in an environment where modern medicine and sanitation were not developed. Cases of infanticide of female or male babies were not found in the period of our observation. That the excess of males was not greater may have been due to several factors. One was the emigration of male workers to cities and distant lands, leaving the women in the village. Another was the institution of "old maid houses," the membership of which consisted of many spinsters as well as divorced women who chose to return to their own parents' village to live. There were four "old maid houses" in the village, with a total membership of about sixty women. Another contributing factor was the development of embroidery as a subsidiary industry in the village. This kept many women of landless families, who otherwise were likely to seek work in the cities, in the village.

The age composition for both sexes was roughly as follows: under fifteen years, 30 per cent or 330 persons; between fifteen and fifty-five years, 55 per cent or 605 persons; over fifty-five years, 15 per cent or 165 persons. Somewhat less than half of the first group seemed to be under five years of age. Insofar as these figures are only general percentages reproduced from memory, it would be unsound to compare them with figures for other localities in China. Nevertheless, there was a smaller percentage under fifteen years than in many other Chinese rural communities.[4] This may be a reflection of a lower birth rate resulting from the year-round and seasonal emigration of many of the males of working age.

There were a fair number of old people of both sexes beyond the age of sixty in the village, one reason being that, although the young people might tend to emigrate, it was customary for the émigrées to return to the village to spend their old age. Among the ten or so persons beyond the age of seventy, one spoke fluent English, having worked in Singapore most of his life. A very poor widower who lived a miserable life by himself died in 1950 at the age of seventy-three. Although there were no available data on life expectancy, general observation seemed to show that the high frequency of deaths under the age of ten and especially under five was a preponderant factor in evaluating the longevity of the village's population. The villagers said that if a child passed his tenth year safely he had a fair chance of living to the prime of life, and that if he passed his fortieth year safely his chances of living another fifteen or twenty years were good.

The Wong clan had a hand-written genealogical record in which the date of birth and death of every male member was carefully kept. A calculation was made of the average span of life of those born in the middle of the eighteenth century and of those born during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The average life span of males of the first group was in the lower forties and that of the second group in the upper thirties. No similar calculation was made of the Lee or other clans because of the inaccessibility of their records. If the Wong record was representative, the shortening by three or four years of the average life span is significant; for it might reflect many phenomena, including the possible lowering of the standard of living for a large number of the peasants during recent times resulting from political disturbances, civil wars, social instability, and growing concentration of land ownership in the hands of a minority group.

Regarding the complex problem of the balance of births and deaths, the crude birth rate in the year 1949 was about twenty-one and the crude death rate about eighteen, giving an annual rate of growth of about three per thousand population. This was considerably lower than the rate of five per thousand as estimated by Ta Chen for China as a whole.[5] The birth and death rates were also lower than those in most rural communities where sample studies have been made.[6] The lower birth rate might reflect, among many factors, the seasonal and year-round emigration of male workers in the reproductive age. The absence of any epidemics in the village in 1949 contributed toward the comparatively low death rate. The record for one year is not enough to produce a conclusive picture on the complex problem of the balance of births and deaths, which are subject to such fluctuating factors as economic conditions, marriages, and epidemics; but there is little doubt that the village's population had been experiencing a long-term slow growth. Old villagers over sixty concurred in the impression that the village was more populous than when they were young; and the continuous efforts at extending farm land into the river substantiated their observation.

Size of Family

The 1,100-odd villagers of Nanching lived in some 230 separate families. Household is probably a more accurate term for these basic kinship units, for married brothers might have separate units of living but maintain very close family relations, particularly if their parents were still living. Nevertheless, in conformity to common usage, the term family is used here with the above qualifications.

The average size of a family was about 4.8 persons, excluding the year-round emigrants who visited the village only occasionally. The average family with no emigrants generally consisted of parents, their children, and at times the father's living parent or parents. For the majority, if the parents had two or more married sons, the parents lived with one married son's family but frequently visited the other sons' families. In common with other parts of China, the "large family" where parents and all married sons maintained a common unit of living was in the minority in this village, occurring mainly among the wealthy.

The size of the family increased with the accumulation of wealth. Among the resident villagers, Wong Han was a wealthy landlord with considerable landholdings in the village and an import and export firm in the city of Canton. A man in his early sixties, he lived with his wife, two concubines, two married sons and their wives, one unmarried son and two unmarried daughters, and three grandchildren, all as one household with common property. Although the married sons and their wives spent most of their time in their common city residence, family unity was effectively maintained among the fourteen members. This was one case of a wealthy family still maintaining its residence in the village. Other wealthy families had moved to Canton or Hong Kong to enjoy the luxuries of city life and the opportunity for urban enterprises, usually leaving behind a concubine and her young children to watch over the house and the land in the village. An example was Wong Hung, who had become a wealthy merchant in Hong Kong and left his third concubine and his twelfth and thirteenth child in the village. Thus his village household had only three members in spite of the large size of the family maintained by all the normal kinship ties and supported by common, undivided property. Two other wealthy families were in a similiar situation.

Descending the economic scale, we find Wong Yu, a middle peasant in his mid-forties, who farmed about three and a half acres of land and maintained a fairly comfortable standard of living compared to the general level of the village. He had a younger married brother who lived in a separate household; his mother had died about ten years previously, but his father, then in his early seventies, was still living. He and his wife and their four children lived with his old father; the family consisted of seven members. Another middle-peasant family farming about two and a half acres of land consisted of husband, wife, and two young children, with both of the husband's parents dead, and one married younger brother living apart in another household. This family had four members. Further down the economic scale there were many families with unmarried sons who had already passed the customary marriage age, thus limiting the size of the family. Wong Mi was a case in point. He was already twenty-three, with both of his parents in their mid-sixties; but since the family was able to rent only an acre of poor land and could not finance his marriage, he lived with the old parents, and the family consisted of three members. Wong Chun, a landless peasant in his forties, had been in the same position when he lived with his aged parents ten years before, and now, both parents having died, he lived alone. There were ten or fifteen families in the village with single unmarried sons.

Even if the poor peasants were able to marry, poverty was a serious restricting factor on the size of their families. The village in 1949 had a high infant-mortality rate of about 300 per thousand live births. Owing to poor nutrition and lack of medical care, the incident of death bore more heavily upon the infants of the poor than upon the well-to-do. One poor family in 1948 consisted of a young couple and a four-year-old daughter. In 1949 a son was born. Less than two weeks after birth the mother had to work in the fields a good part of the day, leaving the baby home with the little sister. Being a child herself, the little sister could not care adequately for the baby and the baby cried a great deal. Since the mother did not have much milk, because of poor nutrition and hard work, she started to feed the baby mashed sweet potatoes when he was only two weeks old. In less than six months the baby died. Such occurrences were not uncommon with the poor, who considered it fortunate if they were able to raise two children to maturity out of six or seven live births. The mother has to work so hard that miscarriage is also a limiting factor in the birth rate of the poor. One mother in her fifties had been pregnant nine times, four pregnancies ending in miscarriage and only two infants reaching maturity. Another woman in her late fifties had had thirteen pregnancies, seven of which ended in miscarriage, with only one son and one daughter who attained maturity.

Although infanticide was not found in this village during the period of field investigation, there were cases of abandonment of babies, another limiting factor in the size of the poor family. One family consisting of only a young couple had a baby girl. Inquiring about the happy incident, we found the baby gone. The mother told us that the baby had been given to "a very good orphanage" a week after its birth; but later she admitted that the baby had been left at the door of a prosperous looking house in the city in the early hours of the morning because she had to work and could not care for it properly. She was offered a supply of milk powder in the hope of recovering the baby, but when the father went to the house to inquire, no one knew where it was.

The Working Force

Although not everyone of working age among the 1,100-odd people worked, there was no marked division of the population into a group who worked and a group who did not, as was the case in many other village communities.[7] Except for the winter months when farming was slack, one saw few idlers on the village streets during the daytime, almost everyone being busy with some task in the village or in the field. Even old people were engaged in light jobs in spite of their slow pace. Those who did not work were the young children who frolicked on the streets and the very old who dozed or chatted in the doorways of the spacious ancestral halls.

The only sign of the gentry group, whose tradition was to shun labor by hand, was seen in one unemployed teacher of traditional learning. He had formerly taught in the village traditional school, but since the establishment of a modern elementary school in the village he had been out of a job. He owned slightly less than two acres (12 mow) of poor land from which he collected rent, and he depended entirely upon this rent for his living. Since the rent was small, he lived a very meager life, but he refused to till the soil himself to better his own living.

Large landlords did not work at physical labor or engage directly and actively in agricultural enterprises. The large landlords in Nanching lived in the city, with the exception of Wong Han and his two grown-up sons. But even Wong Han and his sons lived in the city for a part of the year, and when they returned to the village it was generally only to collect rent and to see that their land was being properly cared for by the tenants. Those who constituted the leisure class of the village were the few concubines left behind there with their children; and the children, when ready to enter the upper grades of elementary school or high school, would be taken to the city for further education to fit them for living in the city rather than in a rural community like Nanching. There were many such examples in the village. Wong Hung's fifth son remained in the village with his own mother and attended the village school for several years, after which he was taken by his father to Hong Kong to enter school where he could learn English and acquire modern knowledge that would prepare him for a commercial career. In 1949, when he was about eighteen years old, he returned to the village for a prolonged visit. A slickly dressed city boy, he was one who loafed and did no work. He may be viewed as a sample of many of the younger generation of the wealthy class who had drifted permanently from the village and should not be counted among the resident population.

Below this class, there were a dozen or so small landowners, including many widows, who were too old to work and depended upon the meager rent from their land for subsistence. But even these people were constantly trying to find light work in order to supplement their income.

Aside from the foregoing elements, everyone performed some sort of productive task. In the upper bracket of the middle peasants there were a few who did not perform physical labor but who nevertheless actively organized and supervised productive activities. Such a person was Lee Feng. He had received a high school education in the city of Canton, and was now in his forties. Since he possessed a knowledge of the domestic and international situation seldom found among villagers, he was active in local politics and could be regarded as a member of the "new gentry." But he actively managed a farm of about four acres and a fish pond, the physical work being done mainly by hired labor with his own occasional participation. He tended the fish pond himself. He once personally carried a hundred pounds of vegetables from his own fields to the railway station, and after arriving in Hong Kong, again personally transported it to the Hong Kong market in order to cut the middleman's profit in Canton. This was heavy physical labor. It was obvious that this fellow tried to avoid physical labor if he could, but he was willing to perform it if necessary. Not all of his time was devoted to farming and marketing, for he kept busy visiting people or going to meetings in the nearby town. Others of similar economic status but without similar educational background and political interest generally devoted all their time to organizing and supervising farming, with personal participation in the physical work. For the landless peasants and farm laborers, idling, of course, was not possible. The work day was long at busy seasons, beginning when dawn barely broke and continuing till it was too dark to see.

The working age for males began differently with families of different economic status. The period of school education lasted as long as family finances permitted, often extending beyond the late teens for the well-to-do. In the middle-peasant families, one to three years of schooling was generally given a child between eight and twelve; after that, he began to help in the field at light jobs such as weeding by hand and carrying light bunches of harvested crops from the field to the piles before they were carried home by the father. At fifteen or sixteen he was considered a full-fledged worker, learning to assume heavy duties such as plowing and carrying heavy loads on his shoulders and drawing water from the irrigation pond to the fields by the hand or foot pump. His active working age continued until he was about fifty-five, when his physical vigor began to decline and his physical labor tapered off to lighter tasks. Wong Yu's father, for example, still helped with weeding and harvesting vegetables in the field and acted as the weighing man in the local fruit market, although he was in his early seventies.

In the poor family the working age began earlier, for generally the poor child enjoyed no schooling and the family's need for all available labor was ever present. He began to help with light jobs in the fields at the age of eight or nine, or he might be hired to watch water buffaloes, a traditional occupation common to the rice region of South China for young boys beginning at the age of nine or ten. From then on, whether working at home or being hired out, his physical labor increased with age until maturity, and tapered off at a later age than for those who were economically better off.

With the exception of the members of the large landlord families, women in the village worked in the fields or at other employment in addition to their household duties. Working women were a common tradition in the province, and the bound feet which had crippled women for many types of work in other places were not seen at all in this village, not even among women over sixty. Except for heavy tasks such as using the plow, women were seen at practically all types of jobs that provided a living, particularly in busy farming seasons. The transplanting of rice seedlings, weeding, harvesting, picking vegetables, selling the produce in the local market – should this be preferred to selling to the wholesale houses in Canton – were jobs in which women participated regularly. Their participation in production activities was less continuous than that of the men, and they appeared less ubiquitous than men in the fields, because the heavy burden of household duties kept them home a good part of the day. Judging from conversations with the village women, a peasant's wife who had young children probably spent one-third of her time helping to earn a living, and wives with grown-up children worked more than this proportion.

Generally given no school education even in the well-to-do families until after ten years of age, a girl began her working age earlier than a boy. At the age of about eight she started with light household duties such as watching the younger children and fetching light objects; she also worked along with her mother in the fields at light work. Her duties at home and in the fields increased until she was married off at sixteen or seventeen to another family, where her arduous domestic and production tasks continued until she reached her fifties, when they tapered off to lighter tasks. The woman's burden was so heavy that she generally looked older than her age.

From the foregoing description it is clear that, aside from the somewhat fewer than 150 children under the age of five, almost everyone in the 1,100-odd population was a part of the working force that toiled to wrestle a living from the land and from subsidiary occupations. The few who did not work had gone to the city, save for a few of their women and young children left behind. There was no significant leisure class resident in the village.

CHAPTER III

The Land and Its Exploitation

The basic importance of Nanching's agrarian economy was evident in the physical outlay of the settlement: a compact group of houses enveloped by a broad belt of open fields, presenting an ecological pattern in which the village site was spatially adjusted to the convenience of exploiting the land.

As for the 1,100-odd inhabitants, their labor in coaxing the land to yield a crop was the central theme around which all other individual and social activities were organized and toward which their outlook on life was oriented. Their success and failure and their sadness and joy in life were determined largely by whether there had been a "good year" or a "bad year." This was part of a national outlook as expressed in the universally popular couplet posted on doors everywhere on the Chinese New Year: "The winds harmonious and the rains timely; the state at peace and the people secure." And the requirements of an agrarian life, with successful agricultural production as a constant guiding objective, exerted a shaping influence on the village's socioeconomic structure, a structure which included the strong family unit and its extended kinship system, the self-sufficient and restrictive economy, a diffused pattern of social and economic life that restrained the development of specialization, the earthbound local political system that was only loosely integrated into the central political organization of the nation, the lack of a popular learned culture, and the worship of deities of the natural forces that served as a reassurance of agricultural success. Since the peasantry constituted over 80 per cent of the nation's population, it is fully understandable that agrarian well-being was of major consideration in the social and political principles in the Confucian orthodoxy which still dominated the thinking of those in this village who were over forty years of age. Thus the agrarian economy had bred and nurtured the characteristics that marked the life of Nanching as well as the Chinese national culture of which this village was a part. Of decisive importance to the agrarian economy were the land itself and the ways of its exploitation which bore the closest relationship to the existence of the community.

The Land and Its Types

The 1,400 mow or roughly 230 acres of land which represented the village's most valuable economic asset fell into three categories in terms of utilization: the heavily cropped low land, the partially planted hillsides, and the grass-grown highlands and hill tops where erosion from the torrential tropical rains had exposed protruding rocks. The cultivated land consisted of irrigated and unirrigated fields. On the basis of productivity, the fields could be further classified as fertile fields, medium fields, and poor fields. The unirrigated lands were usually the poor fields, while the medium and the fertile fields were found in the irrigated areas. Obviously, the accessibility to water made the distinction between different grades of land where rice culture constituted the backbone of the local economy, rice needing inundated fields in which to grow. Native fertility of the soil was important in this matter. An instance was the "new enclosure," a highly fertile patch of about fifteen acres recently enclosed from the river's mud flat, its native fertility being regarded as an outstanding point of its value. But most of the village land had been steadily farmed for many centuries. The humus content and other sources of fertility of the soil represented human efforts in improvement and maintenance more than native fertility, which was originally limited in the clayey soil. With accessibility to water the matter of fertility was remedied by the existing agricultural techniques.

Thus for most of the village land the availability of water was the chief determinant of its class and value. Good land must be relatively low land in order to be easily irrigated. For this purpose, enclosed fields (*wei t'ien*) were most valued among irrigated lands. They were so called because they were enclosed from the mud flat of the river bank by a dike that kept out the river water. At low tide the land was on the same level or slightly higher than the level of the river; at high tide the river was higher than the enclosed land, making damage from floods an ever present threat, as an ill-maintained dike might break or the river might rise above the normal high mark against which the height of the dike was calculated. At frequent intervals along the dike there were gates equipped with wooden doors that could be lifted or lowered to let in or keep out water. From these gates led a maze of irrigation ditches that crisscrossed the entire enclosed land. Throughout the spring and summer, when rice and other crops needed water and the river was high, water was let in to inundate the fields; and the entire low land of the village glimmered from the water as it showed through the thick green fields divided into numerous tiny patches by lines of earth embankment. In the late summer and fall, when the river was lower than the land level, excessive water in the field was drained out through the gates.

From the enclosed fields, the land rose gradually. Where ditch water no longer reached, the low terraced fields were irrigated by hand or foot pumps from the ditches, or at higher points, from ponds that were located at every low point to collect the rain water from surrounding higher surfaces. The pumps were narrow wooden troughs of varying lengths, usually from eight to twelve feet, inside each of which was a moving chain of little interconnected wooden compartments. One end of the trough was equipped with an iron crank hinged to the moving chain, and the other end was open to let in water. When in use, the trough was placed against the bank of the ditch or pond, with the lower end in the water, which flowed into the wooden compartments. The crank was operated either by hand or by foot with additional treading spokes on a wooden axle, and the moving chain of compartments drew the water up and emptied it into the field through the upper end. Even for the toil-hardened peasants it was a back-breaking job to operate the pump by hand; and even the thickened soles of their feet would become sore and blistered from the continuous treading on the turning wooden wheel.

If one's own field was not next to a ditch or pond, water was first pumped into the field next to the ditch or pond, then pumped again from this field to the next until it reached one's own field. Such fields were usually terraced on a slope, and the task was similar to drawing water up a ladder rung by rung. Where the land rose too high, and there were too many rungs for the water to travel, it was uneconomical to irrigate. Here began the dry, unirrigated land. Water was generally carried in buckets in limited quantities for the dry crops on such fields. Where land was so high that even the carrying of limited quantities of water became uneconomical, there began the waste spaces given to growing grass or used as burial grounds. This was a picture of the broader South China scene of terraced hillsides and the relatively unproductive higher land even where the slopes were gentle enough for cultivation but difficult to irrigate by manpower.

The intensive struggle for water and irrigated land was carried on collectively, the family and sometimes the clan being the basic organized unit. Terracing the rising land patch by patch and pumping water level by level were done by individuals under the leadership of the head of the family. But the enclosing of land from the river was beyond the ability of single families; to accomplish this task, the clan moved into action. An example was the building of the "new enclosure" in 1936.

Shock waves of the world depression emanating from the Western industrial economy finally reached this village, thousands of miles from the center of the economic storm. Beginning in 1933 and 1934, prices dropped, urban unemployment mounted, and the matter of making a living in the cities became increasingly difficult. Many who had emigrated from the village now returned, first living with close relatives and later trying to get back to farming. Even those who had never left the village began to feel the pinch of sinking farm prices and tried to farm more land to make ends meet. The need for more land was keenly felt by the entire village. Those were the years when the cry of "bankruptcy of the countryside" rang throughout China, and its mark was imprinted on many aspects of China's rural life wherever modern economic influences had penetrated. The sinking prices of silk, for example, delayed marriages in the silk-raising districts in Kiangsu Province.[1] And what happened in Nanching was another aspect of the effect of the great depression.

Here many families in the Wong clan owned sections of the mud flat of the river on the southern edge of the village land. The mud flat was submerged by water in spring and summer, particularly from late May through June, when the flood waters usually gushed down from the tributaries in the mountainous northern part of the province. By August the summer flood would recede below the level of the mud flat, and the planting of a rice crop on the flat for autumn harvest was normally possible. The mud flat was therefore a one-crop land, provided the flood water retreated early enough for planting. There had long been the suggestion of turning this area into multi-crop land by diking off the river, but the lack of co-operation between the families holding ownership to the flat land prevented action. Now that the need for more land had become urgent, the Wong clan finally decided to use its public funds and mobilize the manpower of the entire clan to build the dike, the land thus reclaimed to be rented at a nominal rate to each family in the clan on the basis of so much land per male for a period of fifteen years, after which the disposal of the land would revert to the full authority of the owners.

By 1936 the "new enclosure" was completed. There were two versions on the amount of land reclaimed. One was 72 mow or about 12 acres, and the other 90 mow or about 15 acres. Since the latter claim was more often encountered in conversation with the villagers, it is the figure adopted in this study, although no actual measurement was made to verify it. For present purposes, the significant point was the function of collective leadership of the clan in the villagers' struggle for land.

About one third of the village's cultivated land was of the enclosed type, reclaimed during varying periods in the past, as the stream, once a broad river, continued to silt up. Another third of the cultivated land was irrigated by pumps from ditches and ponds. The remaining one-third was unirrigated land. A part of the uncultivated highland could be added to this last type, if economical use of it could be found, for a good part of it was average soil free from rocks. The proportion of the unirrigated land was, therefore, a flexible one, as proven by past events.

Crops and Yields

The most productive land of the village was the some 800 mow or about 133 acres of irrigated fields, and from this the villagers derived the major part of their agricultural income. This irrigated land, the "water fields" in local terms, was devoted to rice and vegetables, rice being by far the leading crop. In 1948–49, about three-fourths of the irrigated land were rice fields and about one-fourth vegetable gardens. There was some reduction in vegetable acreage after the Communists came in.

Rice was planted in both "enclosed fields" and fields irrigated by pumping, since wherever sufficient water could be economically obtained, it was the standard crop. The yield per mow (slightly less than one sixth of an acre) differed on individual farms according to a variety of factors, such as existing fertility of the land, ease of water supply, strain of rice planted, and the investment of fertilizer and labor. Taking the average amount of investment of fertilizer and labor and the most common local strains of rice as norms, yields per mow varied from 200 to 450 catties,[2] or about 266 to 595 pounds, per crop, and from 400 to 900 catties, or 532 to 1,190 pounds, for the two crops per year. Yields under or above this range occurred in exceptional cases. The diked lands were high yielding fields, most producing between 350 and 400 catties per mow each crop and double that amount for the year. Most of the land irrigated by pumping yielded 300 to 350 catties per crop. Fields yielding from 200 to 300 catties per crop were usually the higher and less fertilized land, and it is estimated that less than one-tenth of the village's rice fields fell into this class. In our field canvass the most frequently encountered figure for the whole village was 350 catties per mow per crop, or 700 catties (931 pounds) of unhusked rice a year. This is used as the standard average yield for the village's rice land in this study.

The some 200 mow, or roughly thirty-three acres, of vegetable gardens were irrigated fields divided into patches of rectangular shape, each about six to eight feet wide and from thirty to one hundred feet in length, surrounded by ditches three to four feet deep constantly filled with water. A wooden dipper with a long handle was used to water the plants from the ditch. Various kinds of vegetables were planted on these water-surrounded patches – among them eggplant, cucumbers, several varieties of Chinese cabbage, and certain types of squash – but the most common and most valued vegetable crop in this village and the immediate vicinity was the leek. Probably half of the village's income from vegetable gardening was from leek cultivation, the vicinity being the leading supplier of leeks consumed in Canton and Hong Kong.

The yield from vegetable gardens is difficult to estimate for many reasons. The quantity of yield and the market value of each vegetable was different. Generally, several kinds of vegetables were simultaneously planted in the same patch. Also, the market value of vegetables fluctuated from time to time. One common Chinese cabbage, the *pai ts'ai*, for example, yielded six harvests in one season lasting from September to April. The leek, a biennial plant, was planted about March and grew until late winter of its second year. About sixteen harvests were reaped from the same plants in the two-year period, averaging eight harvests a year. In the first year, the leaves of the plants were often bleached by covering them with tubular tiles to keep out the sunlight. Bleached leeks commanded a high price. When the leaves grew to be from eight inches to a foot long they were cut off about an inch above the root and taken to market. When another set of leaves came up, they were harvested the same way. Toward the second half of the second year, the plant was allowed to bear flower buds, but before the buds bloomed they were cut off together with the long stem, and these were sold as leek flowers. After several cuttings, the plant's rate of growth slowed vastly, and the end of the plant's useful life was reached; in the final harvest, the whole plant was pulled up by the roots. Villagers who planted leeks said that in a year when the weather was right and the market demand high one mow of leeks might bring six times the gross income of a mow of rice, but in a poor year, if the market value of the vegetable should drop, there might be a loss on the investment. Averaging the fat years with the lean, and taking all kinds of vegetables together, one mow of vegetables generally brought in a gross income equivalent to about 1,500 catties or 1,995 pounds of unhusked rice, which was a little over twice the yield from one mow of rice.

Because of the high yield, vegetable gardens contributed heavily toward the support of the dense population on the village land. Why the area of vegetable crops was not increased beyond the existing general proportion may be explained by several factors. Vegetables were a cash crop, the income from which depended largely on the fluctuations of the market. An average peasant could not afford to invest all or even the greater part of his land in this risky venture, in spite of the possibility of attractive gains. It might mean starvation for the whole family should the vegetable market sharply decline, for the peasant lived from hand to mouth with little or no margin of savings. The market price of rice was usually more stable, and besides, the family could consume it as the staple food. A poor peasant, Wong Mi, put half of his six-mow (about one acre) farm into leek cultivation in 1949; the next spring the price of leeks dropped steeply, and he and his old parents were near starvation. The heavy investment in fertilizer, labor, and additional equipment, such as tiles for covering the leeks and bamboo sticks for supporting the vines of squash and beans, raised the cost of vegetable production above that of rice. Because the average peasant was short of capital, his ability to raise vegetables was restricted. A technical factor also entered into the matter. After a patch of land had been planted in vegetables for three years, it had to be turned into a paddy field and submerged under water in order to kill the insects and pests which multiply fast in the tropical climate. Flooding was a means of pest control. Moreover, the heavy fertilizer already gone into the vegetable patches made a good base for growing rice without much additional fertilizer during the first year. Since fertilizer must be progressively increased during the second and the third year of rice planting, in the fourth year, if the peasant could afford it, the field was returned to vegetable gardening. This system prevented the continuous use of the existing patches for vegetable raising and restricted any sudden transfer of certain rice land to vegetable gardens.

The higher, unirrigated land was devoted to dry crops such as sweet potatoes and taro, peanuts, and certain types of beans such as meng beans and red beans. Where the land was lower and water more accessible, squash and some types of green-leaf cabbage might be planted, but the area of such land was small in proportion to all the unirrigated land. Income from the unirrigated land was low, averaging the equivalent of about 200 catties of unhusked rice annually per mow, less than one-third of the average yield from rice fields. Because of the low income, much of the higher land that could be cultivated was not under cultivation.

The serious shortage of land was a topic of constant conversation among the villagers, and the fact that even the inclined walls of the irrigation ditches were frequently planted with rice or vegetables in order to utilize every inch of soil with water bore witness to their complaint. When asked why so much of the higher cultivable land was not utilized, the villagers usually answered that water was hard to lift to that height and that such land, being at the edge of the village, was difficult to watch against theft of the crop. The water problem was admittedly a difficulty, but there were fields just as far away from the village where rice and vegetables were planted. The real reason lay in many factors that made such higher land uneconomical to farm for the average peasant, and water was only one of them, though a vital one. While the yield was light, rent in proportion to the cost was high, as will be seen later. The use of laborious primitive hand methods of farming, including the carrying of water by pails up the slopes, strictly limited the number of mow a peasant family was capable of cultivating. Under such limitations the peasant family could afford to farm only the land which could yield a sufficiently large crop to justify the labor and capital investment. Hence the seeming paradox of neglecting cultivable dry land while population pressure on the land was heavy, a situation quite common with peasant agriculture having a low per capita productivity.

However, under certain circumstances when it became profitable to cultivate such unirrigated land, it was done. An example was the raising of jasmine flowers in the late 1920's and the early 1930's. At that time there was a foreign market for Chinese jasmine tea, and tea manufacturers paid a good price for the flower. According to the villagers, close to one hundred mow of the dry land was covered with the fragrant jasmine plants and almost every peasant family raised a few patches of jasmine. After 1933–34 the acreage dropped sharply because of the depression that cut the foreign market for Chinese tea. By the time of the Japanese invasion in 1937 there was no more jasmine cultivation.

Among the factors determining the choice of crops were marketing conditions and the availability of economical means of transportation to the markets, a situation apparently common to other parts of China where the process of commercialization of agriculture was seriously breaking down local self-sufficiency.[3] In Nanching the considerable acreage in vegetables that helped to sustain a high population density, and the episode of jasmine raising, resulted from the village's close proximity to Canton and the accessibility to cheap water transportation. The city of Canton was ringed by a belt about five or six miles wide where vegetable gardens densely dotted the rustic scene, and Nanching lay within that belt. Another factor in the development of truck farming in this territory was the accessibility to fertilizers, which vegetables needed more than other crops. Both human excreta and garbage were common fertilizers for truck farming here, and a major proportion of both came from the big city. At high tide in the spring and summer, when the little stream was navigable, one saw large wooden barges docked at the edge of the village unloading city garbage and night soil. Wooden barges loaded with the same contents were frequently seen slowly sailing on the Pearl River ten or twenty miles downstream, but the price of the cargo would be much higher there than in Nanching. An enveloping belt of vegetable farms around an urban center is an ecological pattern characteristic of Canton as well as other cities. Nanching's location within this belt served to tie the village to the economy of the city.

Fruit cultivation was comparatively unimportant to the total economy of the village. The major fruits raised were the tropical lichee and guava. Lichee is a fruit unique to this region and commanded a good market price, but guava is a cheap fruit. Both were subsidiary crops planted on spare grounds such as small patches of raised land among the diked fields and on both sides of the broad dikes. There were no orchards in the village. It was estimated that only about 2,000 catties (2,660 pounds) of lichee and about 6,000 catties (7,980 pounds) of guava were produced in 1949, which brought an income equivalent to approximately 2,000 catties of unhusked rice for the lichee and about 1,000 catties for the guava, totaling about 3,000 catties (3,990 pounds) of unhusked rice.

The Method of Farming

Some general observations on the method of farming are necessary here in order to understand the leading technical factors that governed the life of the villagers and placed certain limitations upon that life. The first of such factors were the major types of activities in the farm calendar. For rice culture, this factor has been presented in considerable detail in Fei's works on three Yunnan villages and on Kiang Ts'un village.[4] Although geographically in another region, the major features of rice culture were essentially similar in Nanching; therefore, only an outline of the local practice need be given.

In this double-crop region, rice was planted in March and August and harvested in late June or July and again in November. March to November was the major farming season, which was interspersed with slack periods. Early in March the earth was turned with an iron-tipped wooden plow pulled by a water buffalo. The very poor who could not afford a buffalo used a large iron-tipped wooden hoe for the same purpose. The tool was a thin hardwood plank of rectangular shape about one foot wide and two feet long, with a sharp iron edge clamped to the digging end and a long wooden handle on the other end. We have seen a woman in her late fifties and a young boy of twelve or thirteen each laboriously swinging such a hoe to turn the earth. The speed of this exhausting labor was of course much slower than plowing with a buffalo.

The plowed soil was raked smooth, fertilizer was applied, and water was let into the field, which was then ready for the transplanting of rice seedlings. Seedlings were raised in a seedbed, a tiny patch fenced off on the side or corner of the field. Some peasants bought seedlings from other peasants who raised more than they could use for themselves. Seedlings of an improved strain were sold in a neighboring agricultural experimental station, but only the wealthier peasants could afford to buy them. Here lay the differential disadvantage of the poor peasants.

Beginning from the middle of March, the transplanting of seedlings took place. The whole family production team was on the scene. The peasant, his wife, and older children each took the seedlings by the bunch, ten to fifteen plants, and pushed them into the soft inundated soil. The bunches were planted in rows, with about a foot between bunches and 1.2 feet between rows, a method which called for reform by modern agriculturists. For the first thirty or forty days the emerald green crop demanded little attention except keeping the water at the proper level. But after this period came the first weeding; the second weeding a month later. This was done by hand, and everyone in the peasant's family old enough for such work participated. With the second weeding went the job of adding fertilizer. Soon after the second weeding, the rice plants would begin to "draw stalk," the stalk bearing the rice grains. Swaying in the breeze under the baking tropical sun, the heavily laden plants turned the rice fields into a broad golden-yellow landscape that gladdened the hearts of the peasants. The grain was now allowed to stand to "draw starch" to fill the hull of the kernels.

Excessive rain or a storm at this time would flatten the heavily laden stalks to the wet ground, causing spoilage of the kernels. When the kernels had "drawn enough starch," water was let out of the field, and both the soil and the stalks were allowed to dry under the hot sun. The drying of the stalk made it easier to detach the kernel in the threshing process. Rain at this stage would cause the kernels to sprout on the stalks, resulting in spoilage.

Then came the harvest, when all the rice plants would be cut off a few inches above the ground with a sickle. Threshing was done on a threshing board constructed of a series of serrated crossbars supported underneath by a large wooden tub and surrounded on three sides by a bamboo mat to prevent the grain from flying off in all directions. The peasant, stripped to the waist, firmly grasped a bundle of the rice plants, and repeatedly whipped it hard against the threshing board until all the kernels were detached from the stalks and dropped into the catching tub underneath. Bundle by bundle the threshing was done until the whole crop was finished. Then the grain and the stalks and leaves would be taken home with a carrying pole on the peasant's shoulder. The plant was used as fuel at home.

The grain was dehydrated by spreading it out on the ground to sun. The spacious stone-paved yards in front of and inside the ancestral halls served as the main drying grounds. When the grain was sufficiently dried it was swept up from the floor and put in a wooden winnower to blow off the dirt before storing or selling. The winnower was a large wooden box equipped with a hand-cranked fan like a wheel made of thin wooden slats. The husking of the rice, formerly done by pounding in a stone mortar, was now done in the mills by modern machinery in Pingan Chen or other nearby points. A few stone mortars still existed in the village; in peasant houses they were occasionally used to pound flour from glutinous rice in small quantities mainly for home consumption.

The months of June, July, and August were the busiest farming season for the local peasants; for as soon as the exhausting harvest work was done, no time could be lost before starting the chores of plowing, fertilizing, pumping water into the fields, and transplanting seedlings for the second crop. Any time lost here might mean insufficient water for the plants, for precipitation tapered off after September. Not until the transplanting was done could the peasants enjoy any respite. The process of the second crop repeated that of the first. During the period of the two crops from March to November, the peasants had their slack seasons between transplanting and the first weeding, between the first weeding and the second, and between the second weeding and the harvest.

But this was a multi-crop territory. The slack season of the rice crop was generally taken up by chores required for the vegetables which demanded continuous attention, since practically every peasant family devoted a part of the farm to vegetable gardening. To begin with, the digging of the deep ditches to make a rectangular patch for vegetables and the banking of the walls of the patch with damp mud bricks was a hard and skilled job. This was frequently done by skilled farm laborers hired by the peasant, who might possess the skill but might not have the special tools which, besides the regular digging hoe, included a flat-tip iron digger that resembled a giant chisel attached to a wooden handle.

Generally, in any period throughout the year some vegetable crops were growing in the fields. In the hot and damp period of late spring and summer eggplant and several varieties of squash and beans were grown. Most of the green-leafed vegetables would become stunted in their development if planted in this period. The green-leafed vegetables such as the several kinds of Chinese cabbage and the regular cabbage familiar to the West thrived in the cooler and drier period of fall, winter, and early spring. Leeks, however, grew the year round and supplied one of the few green-leafed vegetables during the hot and humid season, a fact partly responsible for its high market value during the summer and its economic contribution to the villagers' livelihood.

When one crop of vegetables was harvested, the soil was turned and the clods broken up by a digging hoe and leveled with an iron rake. Fertilizer was applied, and seeds or seedlings of a new crop were planted. Hand weeding was a constant job; watering with the long-handled wooden dipper had to be done an average of three times a day, and in the very hot season when evaporation was rapid, as frequently as six times a day. The soil had to be cultivated with the hoe frequently as the heavy tropical rains packed the earth continuously. Instead of the two applications of fertilizer common with the rice crop, fertilizing was much more frequent for vegetables. Besides the heavy fertilizing of the soil at the beginning of a crop, usually with city garbage, additional fertilizing, usually with diluted urine or a mixture of diluted urine and excreta, was given every ten days or so with most vegetables. Although the peasant had to dispose of his rice only twice a year, he had to spend much time in marketing his vegetables. Each time he had enough ripened eggplant or cabbage ready for harvesting he must spend the greater part of a day cutting them and taking them to the wholesale houses in the city. Since the retail market in nearby Pingan Chen took only a small proportion of his produce, insignificant in relation to the total quantity he raised, the peasant often did not bother with retail selling in the market place because of the uneconomical consumption of time. Leeks required cutting every thirty to forty days during the vigorous growing period; and the cutting, washing, bundling, and marketing of the produce demanded much of the peasant's time.

Thus slack seasons between the rice crops did not leave the tropical farmers of Nanching completely free. Even during the winter months they were busy, since many vegetables thrived in the cool months when the rice fields lay fallow. The peasant's personal life was dictated by the schedule of farm chores, many of which, like planting and harvesting, could not be delayed too many days without causing economic loss. A peasant who combined rice crops with vegetable gardening, as was the general rule in this village, might have some days when he felt relatively free during the slack season of the rice crop, but he did not have any protracted period of complete leisure which he could devote to the development of other social, economic, or cultural interests.

His mental outlook was conditioned by the simple organic cycle of his crops. His economic ties with the urban centers and his occasional visits there did not change the basic conditioning factors relentlessly exerted upon him by the simple, cyclical, demanding, and poorly remunerative farm schedule. The rich and complex urban culture standing at close proximity to him failed to inculcate in him an urban way of life. So the peasants of Nanching, only five miles from a great city and economically related to it, remained bound to their agrarian tradition; and the novelties and fascinations of the city appeared to them totally incongruous to their compelling earthy scheme of existence, however socially and economically restrictive such a scheme might be.

Features of Farm Management

Some features of the local farm management may be presented as another set of technical factors governing the life and activities of the peasant. First comes the size of the farm. Nanching shared a common feature of the rice region of China, namely, the minute scale of farm operation. The majority of the farms were from five to ten mow (about 0.83 to 1.66 acres). Fairly common were farms over ten but under fifteen mow. Less common but still found in good numbers were farms above fifteen but under twenty mow. But farms over twenty mow were few. There was only one large farm, that of Wong Yung, who operated about seventy mow (somewhat less than twelve acres), in 1949. Large farms on diked land of 1,000 mow or more each, often found along the banks of the lower Pearl River, were not encountered in this vicinity or within the border of Nanching. At the other extremity of the scale, there were some farms of only two or three mow (less than half an acre), but these were also few, for such farms did not afford a family even minimum subsistence.

Associated with the size of the farm was the scattering of minutely divided plots of land, a common feature of China's farm economy in both the wheat and the rice regions which Nanching fully shared. Repeatedly we had to travel over the entire domain of the village land in order to see all the plots of land farmed by one peasant. Wong Yu, for example, farmed about twenty mow in the period 1948–1950, with the land divided into about thirty plots situated in five or six different locations, some of which were right at the edge of the village site, a highly desirable location, while others were far out on the periphery of the village land. It was about a mile from the village site to the farthest plot, and it took us about two hours to zigzag our way along the paths on the earth embankments in the fields to see all his plots varying from a fraction of a mow to one or two mow each. Plots larger than two mow were rare. Not less than a thousand plots were found among the some 800 mow of irrigated land in the village. In view of the obvious inefficiency of the system, consolidation of scattered plots within one farm had long been advocated as a necessary step in the improvement of China's agricultural production.

Martin Yang, in his study of the Tai Tou village, suggested the leading factors that went into the making of this system. First was the Chinese inheritance system, which was not based on primogeniture but divided the land among all male heirs, though not necessarily in equal shares. Here began the process of dividing a piece of land into separately owned plots which might be farmed by the owner or rented to others. To equalize the value of each share of land or to arrive at the approximate value of a certain share, pieces of poor land went with pieces of good land in different locations in the making of one share of land to an heir. The selling of land in small parcels, frequently a fraction of a mow, by peasants who were accustomed to selling only as little of their land as absolutely needed to meet financial exigencies was also an important factor in dividing the land into numerous small portions. As these processes of inheritance and buying and selling in small plots continued for centuries, few large plots of land remained intact. A possible exception was the land newly enclosed from the river, where owners possessed plots of five to thirty mow each. But this land was now divided into numerous plots for renting to the clansmen, as previously mentioned. At the end of the fifteen-year period, when the land was to revert to the owners, should an owner decide to farm his own land, some of the individual plots would be much larger than the average plots. But such plots would not be able to resist for long the process of subdivision under the traditional system of land ownership, inheritance, and trading. A rich landlord might own fairly large contiguous plots, but he generally subdivided them into small plots to rent out since he usually did not engage in farming directly.

An important factor in farm management was that of labor, for farming here was done almost exclusively by human toil. Using the slow hand methods, the average peasant family experienced a shortage of labor at peak seasons of farm work, especially during the period when one crop of rice was being harvested and another crop had to be planted. In such seasons all available hands in the family were mobilized into action. The village school was let out so that the children could help. It was a boom time for the hired labor market, and many migratory laborers came into the village. The size of the farm of the average peasant, who was limited in his ability to afford hired help, was conditioned by the amount of land the members of the family could farm. The general impression of a labor surplus in the Chinese countryside did not apply to those peasants who depended upon operating a farm as the main source of livelihood.

In conversations with the villagers we learned that the amount of land that a husband and a wife in their prime could farm was six mow, in the proportion of five mow of rice and one of vegetables. With the help of two or three older children under fifteen and possibly an old parent, this amount could be increased to about eight or nine mow by straining every hand that could be pressed into service during the busy days. But this took for granted that every workable person would not be ill when he was needed and that everything would go smoothly. Generally, for farming even this amount of land the average peasant needed a few work units (a unit being one man putting in an average working day of ten to twelve hours) of hired labor or exchange labor to tide him over the peak season. This labor situation was reflected most clearly in the large number of farms of five or six mow in the village.

The need for help besides home labor was shown in the figures produced by Chen Han-seng in his study of ten villages in the same county where Nanching is located. According to Chen, the average number of work units of day labor hired per mow was 0.8 for poor peasants, 1.0 for middle peasants, and 3.9 for rich peasants.[5] This condition seemed to be common in other parts of China, particularly the rice region where farming was more intensive than in the wheat region. In the rice region of Eastern and Central China, for example, the percentage of hired labor to the total farm labor was 4.5 for small farms, 15.7 for middle-size farms, and 20.1 for large farms.[6] Sample studies of other localities produced a similar picture, which is applicable to Nanching. The low percentage of help hired by the poor peasant was not a result of his having little need for such help. It reflected, rather, his inability to afford much hired labor and hence his inability to operate a larger and more efficient farm. This situation explains why, although they constituted a majority in Nanching, the poor peasants did not cultivate an equivalent percentage of the total land.

Another situation associated with farm labor was the shortage of work animals, the water buffalo. In 1949 the village had about thirty-five water buffaloes altogether. For the spring rice crop, these met the total needs of the village adequately, for there was a longer period after the autumn harvest and before the spring transplanting over which the plowing work could be spread. But plowing for the second crop had to be done immediately after the harvest of the first crop, and there was little time over which the work could be spread. It was then that the shortage of buffaloes was keenly felt and animals had to be borrowed from other villages.

Because buffaloes were employed for plowing and only occasionally for pulling carts, the period of their usefulness in the year was limited. Also, a buffalo cost locally the equivalent of 1,000 to 1,500 catties of unhusked rice, a price few could afford. Consequently, most peasant families in the village possessed no buffalo but rented from others who had them. In fact, most of the buffaloes were owned by families who raised them for renting out after taking care of their own needs. Two families were keeping five buffaloes each and depended heavily upon renting them for income, as each family farmed only three or four mow of land. Since the rent per day for an animal without a laborer attached was about the equivalent of twice the wage for a unit of day labor, for the poor peasant, who could not afford hired labor, the hiring of a buffalo to plow the land was a heavy financial burden. Many tried to work for families with buffaloes in exchange for the service of the buffalo, but such arrangements could not always be made. Even Wong Yu, who farmed twenty mow of land, borrowed the buffalo of his brother-in-law from the next village in 1948–1950 and worked several days for him in return. Peasants who could not hire buffaloes hoed their fields by hand, a slow process in a situation where labor was already short, and one which did not turn the soil as evenly nor as deeply as plowing with a buffalo. Like the limitation on hiring help, the shortage of work animals was a factor in the smallness of the majority of the farms. This, again, was a feature of the farm economy common to other parts of China. The percentage of farms possessing no animals in Kiahsing of Chekiang Province in the rice region, for example, was 58.97 for small farms, 16.19 for middle farms, and 0.42 for large farms.[7]

The possessions of the average peasant in the village consisted mainly of the house he and his family lived in, what little land he might have, and the few simple farm tools he used. Since he had very little cash, he could not hire human labor or work animals, and frequently he could not afford to buy even enough fertilizer for a good yield and for proper maintenance of the fertility of his land. In 1950, although some better-off peasants in the village bought rice seedlings of an improved variety from a neighboring agricultural experimental station, the majority of the peasants could use only seeds saved from their own previous harvest of whatever variety they had planted. Asked what they felt was most needed, most villagers replied (from what little they knew of modern agriculture): an insecticide and applicators for their vegetable patches. Three well-to-do peasants in the village had recently acquired some imported insecticide and sprayers, and their effectiveness had been demonstrated. The majority of the peasants could only look on with envy, for they could not regularly afford even the cheaper native insecticides such as diluted lime solution or a solution made by soaking tobacco leaves in water. For them, the common method of combating pests was to remove them by hand, a job at which women and older children were frequently engaged. It is needless to say that, besides being slow, this method was useless when the pests were widespread.

The average peasant's lack of financial resources was further worsened by his poor position to command credit at reasonable rates. Credit facilities have always constituted a need in agricultural production because of the relatively long-term turnover as compared with many other types of business enterprises. This was particularly serious with the poor peasant in Nanching. When he contracted a loan it was usually for unproductive purposes connected with family crises like marriage or a funeral. It was the rich peasants and some middle peasants who had the credit standing to borrow money for improving production or expanding the farm.[8] The question of credit facilities will be discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER IV

Land Ownership and Tenancy

The Nanching peasant's relationship to the land was not represented only by the ways he exploited it. Between him and his cultivation of the soil stood the institutionalized system of Chinese land ownership and tenancy; and no less important than the ways in which the peasant exploited the land was his status in this system. It determined to a great extent the success or failure of his economic ambition, his social position in the community, the life he led, the fortune or hardship that faced his family, and the upbringing he could give his children. Although it was a permanent part of the complex national agrarian economy, and therefore Nanching's agrarian problems were a part of the situation that had given rise to the nationwide agrarian movement, the system of land ownership and tenancy had certain different features in each locality. In this chapter, then, we shall examine the system as it operated in Nanching during the two decades prior to the Communist take-over.

Stratification of Economic Status and Land Ownership

The ownership of land was usually considered the most important factor in determining a peasant's economic status, and the possession of a large holding obviously assured him a high place; but ownership was by no means the sole consideration in the shaping of a peasant's economic position. The owner of a small plot of land might have less income than the tenant farmer working a large rented farm. Looking at the stratification of economic status in Nanching, it seems practical to use the common classification of peasants into large landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants,, and poor peasants on the dual basis of land ownership and the size of the farm.

Measured against the local norm, those possessing over thirty mow (about five acres) constituted the landlord class. Those who possessed twenty to thirty mow or operated a farm of over thirty mow of owned or rented land were the rich peasants. The middle peasants possessed six to twenty mow or operated a farm of similar size. The poor peasants, the largest group, were those owning approximately five mow or less or operating a farm of similar size. These definitions must be interpreted against the size of the family. A large family of eight trying to live on the rent from ten mow of land or operating a farm of the same size would belong to the class of poor peasants, whereas a small family of two operating a rented farm of five mow and doing some farm work for others might live as well as a lower-middle peasant.

Field investigations during 1948–49 disclosed five families that owned over thirty mow of land each and about twenty-five families that might be described as rich peasants. Together, these thirty families constituted the upper class of the village. The general impression is that the middle peasant families accounted for somewhat less than one-third of the 230 families in the village, that is, about seventy families. There were about thirty families who had nonagricultural occupations or depended mainly on remittances from emigrants for a living. This left about one hundred families who were in the poor peasant class, a group that included the landless peasants. The situation is reconstructed in the accompanying tabulation.

	Approximate number of families	*Percentage*
Landlords and rich peasants	30	13.0
Middle peasants	70	30.5
Poor peasants	100	43.5
Nonagricultural	30	13.0

One can compare this approximate picture with Chen's study of 840 peasant families in ten villages in the same vicinity as Nanching. The study listed 64.3 per cent poor-peasant families, 23.0 per cent middle-peasant families, and 12.7 per cent rich-peasant families.[1] Since Chen did not explain the basis of his classification, close comparison is difficult.

Collective Land

Who owned how much land? First, it is necessary to recognize two types of land ownership, collective and private. The principal types of collectively owned land in this village were clan land, education land, and temple land. Clan land found in this village was largely confined to so-called sacrificial land, the income from which was used for sacrificial ceremonies to the ancestors, upkeep of the ancestral halls, and other activities connected with ancestor worship. The Wong clan, a poor clan, held only thirty mow of such land in this village. The clan land of the Lees was located in another county about eighty miles to the south, where the headquarters of the Lee clan were located, the clan in this village being only one of the branches. Every year the Lee clan of Nanching received over 10,000 catties of unhusked rice from the income of the headquarter's clan land. In addition, the subdivisions of the Lee clan did possess altogether about twenty mow of sacrificial land within Nanching.

Education land was also under the ownership and management of the clan, but it was set aside for educational purposes. In the imperial days, besides subsidizing the clan school, the income from this land also paid for the stipends of scholars who had passed the primary grade of civil service examinations and for travel subsidies for scholars to go to the provincial and national capitals to take higher examinations. In the Republican period it was used exclusively to support the village school. The Wong clan had somehow lost or sold its former education land. In the 1920's a wealthy merchant of the Lee clan contributed twenty mow of irrigated land for the support of a village school to educate the young of all clans within the village.

Temple land was owned by the temple, and the income from the land supported one priest and the temple. There was only one temple in this village, located immediately outside the northwestern corner of the village site. It had about ten mow of land under its ownership.

Altogether, there were about eighty mow of collectively owned land of various types, accounting for 6.2 per cent of the 1,200 mow of the village's cultivated land, leaving 93.8 per cent in the private ownership of individuals and families. This percentage of collectively owned land was low for a province where the clan and its economic functions were among the most highly developed in China. A village about two miles from Nanching had in 1948 about 70 per cent of its total cultivated area under clan ownership. Clan land averaged about 30 per cent of all the cultivated land in the whole Panyü County in which Nanching was located;[2] and clan land was the leading form of collective land ownership in the province. The bulk of the Lee's clan land lay elsewhere, as pointed out. The Wongs formerly had large clan possessions, according to the elders, but different crises befalling the clan during the past century had led to the sale of most of the land to defray emergency expenses. This explained the relatively small percentage of collectively owned land in Nanching, a situation which affected the livelihood of the villagers substantially, particularly the Wongs, among whom there was a higher percentage of tenancy than among the Lees.

Collective ownership of land affected the livelihood of the peasants differently in different cases. Collective land, especially that in possession of the clan, tended to remain in collective ownership over a long period of time. The institutionalized value attached to such land was high; and selling the clan's land not only weakened the clan's financial resources but also caused a serious loss of clan prestige, since it was considered an offense against the ancestors' good reputation — only unworthy descendants would sell instead of adding to the property built up by their predecessors. The selling of collective land was therefore infrequent, though it did occur at times, especially by clans of declining economic and organizational strength such as the Wongs.

With the land remaining in possession of the clan, individual peasants could work on it only as tenants. The terms for renting collective land in this village were the same as for private land, with the land going to the highest bidder. The renter of collective land was thus subjected to all the normal disadvantages of tenancy, although he reaped certain indirect benefits in the form of clan services supported by such rent. But the terms of rent might be different in some cases, having a different impact on the peasants' life. In the neighboring village mentioned above, clan land, which accounted for 70 per cent of all the cultivated area, was rented to male clan members at nominal rates. In such a case collective ownership of land by the clan had the obvious effect of equalizing the right of clan members to use the land and preventing concentration of land ownership in private hands, a situation particularly beneficial to the poor peasants possessing insufficient or no land. A common complaint against clan ownership of land was corrupt management in the form of embezzlement of rents and favoritism in renting good land to well-placed members. While there was apparently some truth in such charges, a representative factual picture of clan land management has yet to be given.

Private Land

Private ownership accounted for 93.8 per cent of the cultivated land in Nanching. There were five families, A, B, C, D, and E, who were large landowners by village standards though pitifully small by Western criteria. The land possession of these families in 1948–49 totaled 310 mow (about 51.7 acres) and was distributed as shown in the accompanying tabulation. These 310 mow constituted 25.8 per cent of

Family	*Number of Mow Owned*	*Approximate Acreage*
A	120	20.0
B	70	11.7
C	60	10.0
D	30	5.0
E	30	5.0

the village's total cultivated land, but the five families made up only 2.18 per cent of the village's 230 families, or 2.5 per cent of the 200 agricultural families, excluding the thirty families that derived their main income from nonagricultural sources. On the other hand, about twenty families, or 8.7 per cent, of the 230 families possessed absolutely no land. Between these two extremes land ownership seemed to be quite diffused. The rich peasant normally possessed five to ten mow of land, the middle peasant three or four mow, and the poor peasant a fraction of one mow up to two mow. Of the middle and poor peasants who constituted the overwhelming majority of the villagers, almost every family possessed a small amount of land but seldom enough to yield the minimum subsistence for an average family of 4.8 persons. Even the aged Wong Ho, who died in 1950 of insufficiency of food and malnutrition, had two mow of unirrigated land and one fish pond. But between him and Family A the difference in land possession was 60 times, and the difference was even greater between the large number who had only a fraction of one mow and Family A.

Petty owners who possessed a fraction of one mow to two or three mow were numerically a large group. Most of them were poor and middle peasants who farmed their own small plot of land augmented by as much land as it was financially feasible for them to rent. But many of them rented their tiny possessions out to others, supplementing the meager rent by other means when it was insufficient for family subsistence. Such was the case with widows, particularly old widows, who had neither grown sons to do the heavy farm chores nor the means to hire labor to operate a small farm. Similar conditions existed with families whose adult male workers had emigrated to cities and foreign lands. Such emigrants usually managed to send home some savings to buy a small piece of land; but, since rent from the tiny plot of land was insufficient to maintain the family in the village, the emigrants regularly remitted modest sums to supplement the rent. These petty landowners who did not work on the land numbered about thirty families in 1948–49. Landowners who did not work on the soil were technically speaking landlords, but they differed substantially from large landowners, most of whom did not work on the soil either.

Although no detailed account of the distribution of land ownership in this village is presently available, Chen's study of 923 families in ten villages in the same vicinity in 1933 might reflect upon the local picture; his data make up the accompanying tabulation.[3] From the writer's observations, Chen's percentage of land owned by rich peasants applied to Nanching in 1948–49, but his percentage of land owned by middle peasants seemed somewhat high and that owned by the poor peasants somewhat too low. It is to be noted that Chen's study was made in 1933. The protracted war against the Japanese invasion of 1937–45 and the inflationary postwar years wrought changes upon the distribution of land ownership throughout China. In some places the changes accentuated the concentration of land ownership, and in others tended to decentralize it to some degree. The latter applied to Nanching.

Peasant Classes	*Number of Families*	*Mow Owned*	*Per Cent of Families*	*Per Cent of Mow Owned*
Agricultural laborer	83	0	9.0	0
Poor	540	540.5	58.5	22.1
Middle	193	789.8	20.9	28.3
Rich	107	1,212.0	11.6	49.6
Total	923	2,442.3	100.0	100.0

Traditionally, a considerable number of the Lee clan went off to cities and foreign lands to engage in business, while members of the Wong clan were more closely tied to the soil as tillers; hence there were more landowners among the former clan and more tenants among the latter. But the wartime disruption of urban production and the concomitant inflation boosted prices of foodstuffs and made agricultural production more profitable than before. Kwangtung Province was a rice-deficient area, and as war disrupted transportation by which rice was imported, the price of locally produced rice soared. Consequently, when many of the Lees returned from the war-torn cities financially bankrupt, the Wongs were in a good position to buy the much coveted land of the Lees' who needed money and were forced to sell. Thus some of the poor peasants in the village were able to acquire more land than they had owned before the war, even though most of the rich peasants seemed to be able to hold their possessions, possibly because they had a larger margin of savings than others to face the war emergency.

Although a wide gap existed in the matter of land ownership between the rich and the poor peasants in this village, the local picture did not tally with the generalization of the Chinese Communist Party that the landlords and the rich peasants who constituted 10 per cent of the rural population owned 70 to 80 per cent of the land, while the middle and poor peasants and the agricultural laborers who constituted 90 per cent of the rural population owed only 20 to 30 per cent of the land.

Tenancy

About 70 per cent of all the cultivated land in Nanching was rented, and about 30 per cent was tilled by the owners, making totals of about 840 mow of rented land and about 360 tilled by the owners. Aside from the few who lived on income from rent, we did not encounter a single peasant who did not rent some land from others. This was definitely not a community where the owner-farmer played an important part as was the case in many North China localities. A high percentage of tenancy was a characteristic of the rice region of China, particularly in the vicinity of big cities.

But tenancy was not necessarily a sign of poverty. The situation in this village might be represented by the accompanying rough estimates on the proportion of rented land in an average peasant's farm in the different classes. It was normal to find a poor peasant operating a five-mow farm of which he owned about one mow and rented the remaining four. Of course, he might own only a fraction of a mow or even none, but the number of tenants who owned no land was rather small. If the middle peasant generally farmed about ten mow, it was quite usual for him to own two to four mow of it, renting the rest from others. The rich peasant usually had enough land of his own to support a family at the average standard of living of the village, but the rich peasant usually had more working capital than the middle or poor peasant and used it to expand the size of his farm by renting in more land. This was especially so because the war and postwar period had made food production generally profitable; and Nanching was near a big city where fertilizer was relatively cheap and where a

	Per cent of Land Owned by Tiller	*Per cent of Land Rented from Others*
Poor peasant's farm	20	80
Middle peasant's farm	30	70
Rich peasant's farm	40	60

hungry market for food was right at hand. Family D, mentioned above, farmed about seventy mow of land in 1948–1950 but owned only about thirty mow, most of which represented recent acquisitions. In a village about five miles away one peasant operated a farm of 200 mow, all of which was rented land.

Although tenancy was general in Nanching, the burden of rent payment influenced differently the various classes of peasants. For the rich peasant who farmed twenty mow (3.3 acres) or more, the rented acreage in addition to his own land represented an increase in income even though the rent payment might take away a part of the fruits of his labor and investment. But for a peasant who farmed only five or six mow (less than an acre), the payment of rent required a sizable part of the minutely small income needed for his family's subsistence and for reinvestment in the next crop, thus hindering his ability to improve production. It is necessary at this point to consider the types of tenancy and rent in order to see the weight of this burden.

Types of Tenancy and Rent

While there were differences in nature between collective and private ownership of land, there was no practical difference in the type of tenancy and the amount of rent charged under either type of ownership. The situation had been somewhat different forty or fifty years previously, when the Wong clan possessed a sizable amount of clan land. At that time, the clan demanded no deposit from the tenants, the rent of the clan land was less than 10 per cent of the yield, and the right of renting the clan land was shared equally among all males of the clan. This system was still in effect in 1949 in Po Tsun, a neighboring village about four miles from Nanching. There, the collective land of the Wu clan comprised about one-half of that village's total cultivated area, and each male descendant was entitled to rent 1.5 mow of land from the clan at the nominal annual rent of 40 catties of unhusked rice per mow, the equivalent of about 7 per cent of the average yield of the irrigated fields there. The amount of land a male member could rent fluctuated with the increase or decrease of male clan members. In Nanching the "new enclosure" land mentioned previously brought an annual rent of only 15 catties per mow, less than 2 per cent of the average yield from that rich virgin soil, but this privilege was to run for only fifteen years from 1936, ending in 1951, the year of the Communist land reform. Whenever discussing the hard lot of their life, Nanching peasants inevitably complained about the insufficiency of land in the village, and they frequently pointed to the Wu clan in Po Tsun as an example of good fortune bestowed by the departed ancestors, while lamenting the poverty of their own clan as measured by the lack of low rent clan land. The some thirty mow still in the possession of the Wong clan was so small and the clan's financial needs so heavy that it was rented out in the usual manner as private land. Land belonging to the subdivisions of the Lee clan was treated in similar manner.

Practices of permanent tenure, frequently found elsewhere, did not exist in Nanching or in the vicinity. Land for rent was normally thrown open to bidding by prospective tenants every three years, and the highest bidder received the land for that period. At the end of three years, the bidding process was theoretically repeated, but in a majority of the cases the original tenant continued to keep the tenure since he had invested in the land by fertilizing it and a frequent change of tenants was undesirable for proper maintenance of the land. In practice, an owner usually kept the original tenant except in case of habitual rent default or in case of a much higher bid from a more desirable tenant.

The three-year period of tenure as current in the village was partly connected with the technical requirement of a three-year rotation between the vegetable and rice crops. A shorter period than this was not acceptable to the tenant, who had invested heavily in preparing the land for vegetables, including ditch digging and fertilizing, and expected the investment to cover a period of three years. In fact, at the end of a three-year period of vegetable planting, when the land was turned into a paddy field, the heavy fertilizing of the former vegetable patches made it unnecessary to add much fertilizer to the rice crop during the first year. If the tenure terminated at the end of three years, the tenant lost the remaining fertility of the land that had come from his investment. The tenant was therefore frequently forced to put up a higher bid to keep his tenure in the face of the constantly heavy demand for land under the pressure of the existing man-land ratio.

The three-year period of tenure was common with private as well as collective land; but the shorter the period of tenure and the more frequent the bidding, the greater was the opportunity for the owner to exact higher rent from the tenant. There were some private owners in the village who gave only one year's tenure, mostly with the higher land where only rice was planted and where the shortage of water during the dry months made it difficult to plant vegetables. The shorter tenure was an effort to push up the rent within the technical limits of the higher inferior land. This accounted for the higher rent occasionally charged for poorer land than for good land.

During the period of our investigation, rent was paid in kind, in terms of unhusked rice, because of the run-away inflation and the resulting extreme currency instability. Before the war, however, it was paid mainly in cash. It was a fixed rent, so much per mow, as sharecropping was not practiced here. One reason for fixed rents was that, in the general absence of drought or flood which could cause extensive crop damage, the harvest was fairly reliable and it was possible to figure out a constant amount of rent for the year. Another reason was the general lack of participation in capital investment and management of the farm by the owners of the land. The large landlords were mostly absentees who saw greater profit in investing their capital either in owning more land or in urban business than in participating in agricultural production with the tenant. The small landowners were short of capital themselves.

The amount of rent varied greatly with the quality of the land. Officially, land fell into high, medium, and low grades, and this classification was generally used by the villagers. In Nanching, high- and medium-grade lands were irrigated, while low-grade land was generally unirrigated. A mow of high-grade land planted to rice generally yielded between 350 to 400 catties of unhusked rice per crop, or between 700 to 800 catties per year, and the usual annual rent was between 300 to 400 catties, which was about 43 to 50 per cent of the yield. The medium-grade land yielded between 300 to 350 catties per crop per mow, or 600 to 700 catties per year, and the usual annual rent was 300 catties, which was about 43 per cent of the yield. Since the low-grade unirrigated land produced irregular amounts of yield, depending on the type of crop planted and the regularity of precipitation, there was variation in the rent charged. The most frequently encountered amount was 50 catties of unhusked rice, which was about 25 per cent of an annual yield of 200 catties of the same grain, a yield that was common with this grade of land. In all cases, rent was collected twice a year, right after each harvest, when the tenant had rice on hand to pay.

In spite of the better quality of high-grade land, the most common rent quoted for both the high and medium grades was 300 catties of unhusked rice, a figure that was generally mentioned by the villagers as the average rent for irrigated fields. Because of the relatively lower yield from medium-grade land, the rent in proportion to the yield was thus actually higher for medium- than for high-grade land. This put the highest rent rate in proportion to the yield on the medium-grade land, while the best land was rented relatively cheaper. This appeared to be part of a national pattern in China. T. H. Shen, in surveying the national situation, stated: "The rate of rent for the low-class irrigated land is the highest, and that for the high-class is lower." [4] Chen Han-seng, noting the same situation in his study of peasant economy in Kwangtung Province, in which Nanching is located, commented as follows:

> Perhaps the proportion of a share rent has some connection with fertility of land, as well as with the means of production. This may be illustrated by the share rent in Wung-yuen [county], where the landlord collects a rent in grain which is 40 per cent from the best land, 50 per cent from land of medium grade, and 20 per cent from the poorest land. The share rent does not, however, depend on the fertility of the soil alone but largely on the respective amount of labor power and fertilizer which the tenant puts into the land. In this particular district, the tenant of good land often supplies more means of production per mow than other tenants because such investment is certain to pay. Improving the soil, he is actually in a better position to bargain with the landlord who cannot afford to lease his good land to tenants who cannot or will not keep up the fertility of the soil. It is for this reason that the landlord gets less rent from the tenant of the best land, paradoxical as this may seem, than he gets from the tenant of medium-grade land.[5]

Chen's explanation applied well to conditions in Nanching, and it also largely explained why the rich and the upper-middle peasants farmed the best land while the rest had to farm medium- and low-grade land.

In addition to his ability to maintain and improve the land, his ability to pay rent regularly was another factor that affected a tenant's qualification to compete for good land. Although the village was generally free from major natural calamities of flood and drought, yet partial damage to the crop by storms, by irregularity of temperatures, or by excessive rains at the wrong time were frequent occurrences. Family and individual circumstances such as marriage, birth, illness, or death might press heavily upon the peasant's financial resources. All these affected the tenant's ability to pay rent regularly or in full amount; and, obviously, rich peasants, being in a better position than poor ones to weather crises, had the best opportunity to rent the best land.

A last feature of rent was the requirement of a "rent deposit" by the tenant at the beginning of his tenure as a guarantee against default.

The amount of deposit varied greatly with individual landlords, but a common figure was one-half of a year's rent. If there was a change of tenant after a short term such as three years, the deposit was usually returned to the departing tenant; in long-term tenure, the landlord frequently kept the deposit. This requirement also had the effect of limiting the ability of the average peasant to rent any sizable amount of land at one time to expand his farm, for the total amount of deposit required for a large acreage would be beyond his means.

The Landless and Agricultural Laborers

As previously mentioned, there were about twenty families in Nanching that had no land at all and constituted the bottom group in the village's pyramid of land ownership. A few of these families were tenant farmers, but the majority, since they could not finance even the buying of tools, fertilizer, and seeds, worked as "long-term" agricultural laborers on an annual basis. As such, they normally were paid about 1,000 catties of unhusked rice per year and board and room if they owned no home. This income might equal or even exceed what they might have wrested from a small rented farm, but it was not enough to support a family of average size without supplementary employment undertaken by other members of the family. For this reason, many of them never married, and the largest number of bachelors were to be found among landless peasants. Wong Tu-en, a landless peasant working for a rich peasant for nearly ten years, was still a "bare stick" (unmarried man) in his fifties; and there were others in the village like him. They were objects of ridicule and pity in the eyes of the villagers, whose life centered upon the family.

The limited number of landless peasants was not enough to supply all the hired labor required by the village during peak seasons of farm work. The deficiency was partly met by large numbers of migratory workers who streamed into the locality at rice-planting or harvest time. They were mainly the "boat people," a different ethnic group who lived on boats on the river, "a people of floating homes," a people who, according to one theory, were the aborigines of the land before the invading Chinese crowded them out on to the water centuries ago. Living and moving about on their boats, they utilized the slight climatic differences between the northern and southern ends of the Pearl River Delta and worked in different localities in succession, moving from south to north since planting and harvesting began earlier in the south.

When they entered the vicinity of Nanching, they did not live in the village but would either live on their own boats or build temporary sheds from straw and bamboo on top of the dikes near the periphery of the village. In the past twenty years the supply of "boat people" laborers had increased, giving competition to those in the village who depended upon agricultural work entirely or partially for an income. Up to the 1920's, the predominant occupation of the "boat people" had been the transportation of goods and passengers, their boats being at once homes and a means of production; but the boat as a means of production was increasingly affected by modernization of transportation after the 1920's. As steamboats and motor launches mounted in number on the Pearl River, and the building of a steel bridge spanning the river connecting the two parts of the city of Canton took away a substantial part of the ferrying business, the boat people looked increasingly for employment on the land which they had previously shunned, and agricultural work became a major field for them.

Aside from the landless peasants in the village and the migratory boat people, a large number of poor peasants also did piece work for other peasants for a small supplemental income. At peak seasons one man working a normal day of ten to twelve hours received an average of 15 catties of unhusked rice, and in slack seasons about 8 to 10 catties. A woman's wage was about two-thirds those amounts. Such earning was a welcome addition to a poor peasant's family income. The peasant could dovetail his own planting and harvesting, within climatic limits, and work for others, or he could work for others because his own farm was too small to need all the family's labor. For the landless and those short of land, farm labor was an important source of supplementary income.

Thus there were in Nanching those who established permanent right to the land through ownership, those who acquired temporary right to it through tenancy, and those whose relationship to the land was through employment under an owner or tenant. Whatever his status, the life struggle of a Nanching peasant constantly revolved around one single objective: to become the owner of land and more land. The system of land ownership and tenancy had clearly taught him that farming his own land would yield him the largest benefit, and that owning a sufficient amount of it would enable him to live exclusively on rent and free himself and his children from toil and the attendant social and economic restrictions imposed on those who must till the soil for a meager living. The few landlord families in the village reminded him constantly of the value of land ownership and all the blessings of life that it bestowed. It was this proven worth that underlay the almost sacred attitude with which the peasant regarded the land in his possession, especially land inherited from the ancestors which might be augmented by new purchases but should not be whittled down by selling. An important derivative from the value of land ownership was the peasant's attachment to the soil and his consequent social and economic immobility.

Theoretically the same sense of value could be transferred to tenancy or farm employment if these two forms of indirect relationship to the land could be proven to yield a greater economic and social benefit than that which private ownership of land had brought in the past. In this theoretical assumption lies an interpretation of the possible success or failure of the Communist collectivization experiment, which aims at replacing private ownership of land by the collective farm in which the peasant's relationship to the land is established through the large collective organization, thus transforming the peasant into a new type of farm employee.

CHAPTER V

Production, Consumption, and Supplementary Income

The Village's Production and Consumption

THE AGRICULTURAL production of the village's 1,200 mow of cultivated land, rendered in terms of unhusked rice, was approximately as follows: 600 mow of rice produced 420,000 catties of unhusked rice, 200 mow of vegetables produced 280,000 catties of unhusked rice, and 400 mow of dry land produced 40,000 catties of unhusked rice, for a total production of 740,000 catties. After milling, each 100 catties of unhusked rice yielded an average of 65 catties of husked rice.[1] At this percentage of yield, the 740,000 catties of unhusked rice gave 481,000 catties, or 640,000 pounds, of husked rice ready for consumption. Was this amount of husked rice sufficient for the consumption of the village as a whole?

It is estimated that an adult male consumed about one catty (1.33 pounds) of rice a day, averaging heavy consumption during hard-working busy seasons against lighter consumption during slack periods. This included rice as the main staple plus whatever vegetables and, at times, meat that the consumer could afford. In a year, the food needs of an adult male were about 365 catties or 485 pounds. This compares closely with Fei's average of 470 pounds.[2] Averaging the differences between sex and age, each person was estimated to equal 0.75 of an adult male in his prime.[3] This ratio reduced the 1,100 persons in the village to about 825 adult male units. The total food consumption for 825 adult male units was about 301,125 catties or 311,062 pounds in a year, to which should be added about 30 per cent of this amount, or 90,337 catties, for minimum expenses of clothing, housing, and other absolute necessities. Thus a total of 391,462 catties, or 510,644 pounds, of husked rice was needed for minimum subsistence of the entire village, a level which made no allowance for special expenses resulting from marriage, birth, death, or unexpected medical care.

Comparing the total production of 481,000 catties and the total minimum needs of 391,462 catties of husked rice, there appears to be a surplus. But one must deduct the rent which was taken out of the village by absentee owners and not consumed within the village, as well as taxes and costs of production.

Although we do not know the exact amount of rice taken out of the village in the form of rent, the cases of the large landowners mentioned previously furnish a basis of estimate. Family A had 120 mow of land and maintained a large house in which five or six people lived constantly. This family would need rice from about 80 mow for consumption at a very high standard of living, leaving the rent from about 40 mow not consumed within the village. Family B owned about 70 mow and lived in the city; since their house was occupied by poor relatives, the rent from all this land was taken out of the village. Family C, with about 60 mow, was in the same situation. Family D, which owned about 30 mow, ranked with the rich peasants living in the village and operating a large farm; so the product from the land was retained within the community. Family E had about 30 mow and a fish pond; since the rent from this land and pond was consumed by the concubine and her two children plus one female servant all living in the village, none was taken out. Thus, among the five large landowners, there was a total of 170 mow of land the rent from which was taken out of the village. As all that land consisted of good irrigated fields, the rent from the 170 mow amounted to about 51,000 catties of unhusked rice or 33,150 catties of husked rice. Taxation probably took about 10 per cent of the total gross yield from the village, with the estimated factor of tax evasion taken into consideration. The tax then was equivalent to about 48,100 catties of husked rice. Since the total cost of production for the entire village was difficult to estimate because of the diversification of crops, no exact figure can be included here; but, excluding cost of labor, it should not have exceeded at a maximum the figure of taxation.

We find, then, that the village's net production available for its own use was approximately 362,000 catties of husked rice as against a minimum requirement of approximately 391,000 catties, leaving a deficiency to be made up as far as possible by nonagricultural earnings from outside the village, such as wages for embroidery work, remittances from emigrants, earnings from seasonal work in the city, and activities such as peddling.

Family Income and Consumption

To move from the over-all or village balance between agricultural production and consumption to the situation of individual families is a more complex procedure owing to the unequal distribution of village income; but the approximate situation can be derived by establishing the minimum needs of an average family and measuring them against the estimated income of the various classes of peasants in the village.

Using the previously applied standard of 0.75 adult male for each person regardless of age or sex,[4] the food consumption of an average family of 4.8 persons would be that of 3.6 adult males. Such a family would have an annual need of 1,314 catties of husked rice for food. Adding 30 per cent of this amount for other necessities, the total minimum need for an average family for a year would be about 2,141 catties or 2,848 pounds of husked rice. This figure was used as the norm against which we measured the probable income of the various classes of peasants in the village.

To estimate the income of a peasant family, it was necessary to estimate first the leading items of cost of agricultural production in the village. Since these varied with the grades of land and the kinds of crops planted on them, we took as a representative basis medium-grade land which was irrigated and planted in rice. This grade of land was the most common in the village, and the rice crop was quantitatively the basis crop. The year for the following estimates was 1948, the year before the Communists took over the government. Five items figured prominently in the cost of agricultural production: taxes, rent, fertilizer, seeds, and labor. Because of the wide variation in the amount of hired labor used on individual farms, it was excluded from consider-tion.

Only land tax paid directly by the peasant was considered. (There were heavy taxes on the sale and transportation of rice and produce, but they were paid only by the merchants.) In 1948 the main tax on medium-grade land was about 50 catties of unhusked rice per mow, or 7.1 per cent of the average yield of one mow of rice crop. The local subdistrict government levied a police fee of about 35 catties of unhusked rice per mow, or about 5 per cent of the yield. The two items totaled about 85 catties, or 12.1 per cent of the yield per mow. (This tax was paid by the landlord only, a common practice in most parts of China, although in some localities it was divided between the tenant and the landlord.) In addition, the owner of the crop paid five catties, or about 0.7 per cent of the yield, per mow for "crop protection" to a local armed band of racketeers. The three items together made a total of 90 catties, or roughly 13 per cent of the yield. (The burden of government taxes was frequently heavier than this for the small landowners. The tax collector was given a quota for the entire village; and, as the large landlords often used power and political influence to reduce the amount they should pay, the remaining sum was transferred to the small owners by arbitrarily raising the rates on their land. There were no data on the amount thus transferred, but it was known that this occurred practically every year.)

Rent for medium-grade land in Nanching averaged 300 catties of unhusked rice per mow, or about 43 per cent of the yield. The amount of fertilizer varied for individual plots of land, but the villagers considered it normal to apply either 20 catties of human excreta or 50 catties of soya bean cakes, which had the equivalent value of about 40 catties of unhusked rice in 1948, or about 5.7 per cent of the yield. The amount required for seeds per mow, which varied with the different germination rates of the seeds, averaged about ten catties, or 1.4 per cent of the yield. (For comparison, the major difference in the cost of production for vegetables, aside from the more intensive labor, was the much greater amount of fertilizer needed, which averaged the equivalent of about 200 catties of unhusked rice per mow, or five times higher than that for rice.)

Adding up the four items, the cost of production for one mow of rice land owned and farmed by the peasant himself was about 20 per cent of the yield, the peasant retaining about 80 per cent of the fruits of his own labor. For one mow of rice land rented from others but farmed by the peasant himself, the cost was about 51 per cent of the yield, the peasant retaining only 49 per cent of the crop. Although these figures are approximations, since items like labor and maintenance and replacement of farm tools have not been included, they give a sufficiently accurate view of the general family situation to enable us to determine the incidence of deficit or surplus among families of the different classes in the village.

It is obvious that the very large landlords had incomes which vastly exceeded what was needed for an average standard of living. Family A, for example, which owned 120 mow, had a large two-story house with spacious halls and foreign-style tile floors, a large stone-paved front yard, and a garden, all surrounded by a high brick wall with iron-bar gates.

Let us consider a family owning 30 mow of land and living on the rent from it. The rent income was about 9,000 catties of unhusked rice, which, after paying government taxes and local levies at a rate of 85 catties per mow, netted about 6,450 catties of unhusked or 4,192 catties of husked rice. This was three times the 2,141 catties needed for minimum consumption for an average family. Family E represented such a family. They had a pretentious brick house of eight rooms with a garden in the front, which had been built not from income from the land but from business earnings of the husband. It was understood that the income from the 30 mow and one fish pond was used entirely to support the concubine and her two young children and female servant living in the house. They were well dressed in native style and ate meat and vegetables with rice as the staple food. At one meal, for example, they were having one dish of egg pudding with chopped pork and green onion, one dish of fresh fish steamed with slices of salted fish, one dish of green Chinese cabbage, and turnip soup, all in addition to their main staple of rice. A check with the neighbors revealed that this was normal fare with the family. On the first and fifteenth days of every month, as well as on festival days, they would have chicken or duck and roast pork bought from the neighboring town.

Even for a small landlord of 20 mow, life was quite attractive. He collected a gross rent of 6,000 catties of unhusked rice, and, after paying government taxes and local levies, there remained a net income of 4,300 catties of unhusked or 2,795 catties of husked rice, which was 30 per cent above that needed for estimated minimum consumption.

Turning to those who operated farms instead of living on rent, we find that a rich peasant who operated a farm of, say, 30 mow, which was common with this class, could have a better life than a landlord living only on rent he received from the same amount of land. It was common for a rich peasant to own about 40 per cent of the land he farmed and to rent the other 60 per cent from others. On this basis, he owned 12 mow and rented 18 mow. The gross yield from his own 12 mow would be 8,400 catties of unhusked rice, and his net yield after deducting taxes and levies and fertilizer and seeds would be about 6,720 catties. The gross yield from the 18 rented mow would be 12,600 catties, and the net yield after deducting the cost of production and rent would be 6,174 catties. He therefore had a total net income of about 12,894 catties of unhusked or 8,381 catties of husked rice.

When we turn to the next class, the middle peasants, we find that most of them were able to meet the minimum expenses of the family. Consider a peasant operating a farm of 10 mow, for example. Since it was normal for a middle peasant in Nanching to own about 30 per cent of his land and rent the remaining 70 per cent from others, he would own three mow and rent seven mow. The three mow he owned gave him a gross yield of 2,100 catties of unhusked rice, and after paying taxes and other items of cost mentioned above, he had a net yield of 1,680 catties. His seven rented mow brought in a gross yield of 4,900 catties, and a net yield of 2,400 catties after deducting rent and production costs. Thus his farm altogether gave him a net yield of 4,080 catties of unhusked or 2,652 catties of husked rice. Compared with the 2,141 catties of husked rice needed for minimum consumption of the family, the middle peasant seemed on the surface to have a margin of savings to spare. However, since the middle peasant usually employed some hired help that had to be paid from this net income, and a part had to be put aside for reinvestment in next year's crops, his margin of safety even for normal living was precarious. If there should be expenditures for an unusual occasion like illness, marriage, or death, or if there should be too many mouths in the family to feed, or if he should suffer a partial loss of his crop from damage by storm or ill-timed rains, the middle peasant would have to go into debt or seek supplementary income outside of his own farm.

The middle peasant's position is illustrated by a family in the village which operated a farm of slightly over 11 mow. There were an old grandfather in his seventies, husband and wife both in their forties, and three children all under ten. The house had been inherited from the forefathers. The grandfather and three young children all slept in the front room, where there were three wooden-board beds; the back room was occupied by the couple and was used partly for storage of harvested grain, which was simply piled on the dirt floor in a corner. There was a half-story second floor covering the back part of the house which was used for storing grain and straw for fuel. The house had no windows and was dark and damp and disorderly inside, since it was impossible to keep the dirt floor clean. The grandfather watched the children while the mother helped in the field, so only a limited amount of field help had to be hired. The normal menu for the family was plain boiled rice with boiled fresh vegetables like cabbage or eggplant which came from their own land but was of an inferior quality that could not be sold on the market. A few times a month and on festival days they had a little meat. We often saw the children eat standing in front of the house, each holding a bowl of rice with a few pieces of eggplant or squash or a few strips of green vegetables piled on top. Both the adults' and the children's clothes were patched. The husband said that his nine mow of rice and two mow of vegetables in

1949 brought him a net income of about 3,500 catties of unhusked rice (roughly 2,300 catties of husked rice), and that they barely met family expenditures for that year and saved enough for fertilizer and seeds for the crops of the following year. The price of leeks, which they had planted, had fallen sharply; but, fortunately, no one had been seriously ill, the children were too young to incur the expense of marriage, and the grandfather was still chipper, holding death at arm's length in spite of his advanced age.

If the middle peasant was in a precarious position, the poor peasant's situation was generally very hard indeed. A peasant farming six mow would be a representative case — although some poor peasants in Nanching farmed more, and many farmed only two or three mow. Since for this class it was normal for the peasant to own only 20 per cent of his land, the peasant farming six mow would own 1.2 mow and rent 4.8 mow. With all his land in rice, he received a net income of 672 catties of unhusked rice from his own land and 1,646 catties from his rented land, making a total of 2,318 catties of unhusked or 1,507 catties of husked rice. Compared to the norm of 2,141 catties of husked rice for minimum needs, he was at best some 30 per cent short of subsistence requirements, even before he set aside any reinvestment capital for the crops of the following year. Any crop damage from weather or any unusual family needs put him in an inextricable position. It was easy to see why many poor peasants remained single for life or married very late, why so many of their children died in infancy, and why, when an adult died, the family had difficulty in finding a plot to bury him. Elaborate honorific funeral processions were for people like them to sigh over, reflecting the proverb "the poor are without a burial plot."

Wong Mi, previously mentioned, was a peasant of this class. He farmed six mow in 1948–49, of which one was his own. Three mow of his farm were in vegetables and three in rice. He said that he received a net income of about 3,000 catties of unhusked rice or 1,950 catties of husked rice in a period which saw a sharp decline in the price of green vegetables. This income had to feed his family of three, which comprised his father, mother, and himself, besides providing for investment in fertilizer for the vegetable patches for the following year. Fortunately, vegetable crops, upon which he depended heavily, had short intervals between planting and harvests, thus enabling him to circulate his limited capital more easily than the long-term rice crop. The old father in his sixties still helped in the field, and they hired no help. Their small brick house, divided inside into three rooms, was in good condition; it had been inherited from the ancestors and was not a product of current income. They ate rice and green vegetables from the field, and meat was not tasted except for the Chinese New Year and certain other special events during the year. The old mother's clothes were full of patches; those of the father and son showed fewer patches.

Another family, farming only four mow of land, was in a worse condition. The land, one-half a mow owned and the rest rented, was all in rice because of the shortage of both labor and capital to develop a vegetable garden. Their house, which had a thatched roof and thin board walls, was a windowless dark hovel filled with smoke from the cooking stove; their furniture consisted of three wooden-board beds and a rough wooden square table. Piles of straw occupied much of the single room. The family consisted of one middle-aged couple and a sickly looking boy of seven or eight. The wife said that they collected medicinal herbs from among the weeds on the field embankments and hillside to sell in the city, and that both she and her husband worked on other farms to earn some supplementary income. Houses like this one were in the minority even among poor peasants, most of whom had inherited good brick houses. It was when the good houses were burned by the Japanese in the war, as had occurred with many houses in both the eastern and the western ends of the village, or when the peasant became so poor that he had to take down the house in order to sell the timber and bricks, that the houses built to replace them resembled the one described above.

Peasants in Nanching generally wore no shoes. Since the paddy fields were flooded most of the time and the vegetable patches were surrounded by flooded ditches, it was not practical to wear shoes for work; and the year-round warm weather made them unnecessary for protection except for a few weeks toward the end of winter. But there were numerous cases of infected foot wounds resulting from stepping on sharp objects such as broken glass and china, particularly when the main fertilizer used was city garbage in which such objects were mixed. A wounded foot frequently kept a peasant from work for days; and foot wounds constituted the vast majority of the cases treated in a first-aid station set up in the village in 1948–1950. The rich and many of the middle peasants wore wooden sandals for protection after they left the fields, and some of them wore cloth shoes during the cold period of the year; but few of the poor peasants wore even sandals, being unable to afford the small price for them.

We have seen that, of the some 200 families in the village who relied on the land for an income or livelihood, about 30 belonged to the rich-peasant class, about 70 to the middle-peasant class, and about 100 to the poor-peasant class. The foregoing income estimates indicate that a minority of the population lived quite comfortably, a considerable section lived on minimum subsistence with a precarious margin of safety, and the largest group could not make enough from the farm alone to provide even bare subsistence for the family. Stated in another way, yields from the soil alone, whether in the form of rent or production or a combination of the two, adequately supported only one-half of the 200 families. For the other half, operating a farm did not provide a minimum livelihood without some supplementary source of income, such as hiring oneself out as a farm laborer or taking up part-time nonagricultural occupations.

It should be noted here that an obvious defect in our estimate of the approximate income of the villagers is the use of the rice crop alone as the basis of calculation. Since most peasants devoted a part of their farm to truck gardening, which had a different rate of return from investment as compared with the rice crop, it is necessary to give some consideration to the economy of the vegetable crop to give a proper perspective to our estimates of income. As already stated, the general estimate of the gross yield of one mow of vegetables was about twice that of rice, i.e., 1,400 pounds of unhusked rice a year. The leading items in the cost of production were the same as for the rice crop, but there was a greater requirement of labor and fertilizer, the latter estimated to be the value of about 200 catties of unhusked rice per mow a year. Following the foregoing principle of calculation, the net income from one mow of vegetables worked by the peasant himself on his own land would be about 1,100 catties of unhusked or 715 catties of husked rice, and the net income from one mow of rented land would be about 880 catties of unhusked or 572 catties of husked rice, both appreciably higher than the income from one mow of rice crop.

The high yield and shorter turn-over of investment made vegetable crops popular with the poor peasants, and undoubtedly they helped substantially to ease their financial plight, as clearly shown in the case of Wong Mi. For the village as a whole, the higher yield of the vegetable acreage was equivalent to adding 200 mow of rice to the villagers' irrigated land if all irrigated land were planted with rice alone, which partly explains the ability of the existing cultivated land to support such a dense population.

Nonagricultural Sources of Supplementary Income

The Nanching peasants derived supplementary incomes both from subsidiary activities associated with agriculture and from nonagricultural sources, including some specialized occupations, the development of which was not related to the difficulty of making a living from agriculture. It is useful here to list the nonagricultural occupations in the village and the number of persons engaged in each:

Carpentry	1
Masonry	1
Grocery store operator	1
School teacher	2
Seeress	1
Catching frogs and snakes	1
Storytelling	1
Temple priest (Taoist)	1
Peddlers	7
Domestic service	4

The carpenter, the mason, the teachers, and the temple priest were not the direct result of pressure from the difficulty of pursuing an agricultural occupation; but the specialized occupations were not entirely separated from agriculture, for in the above list only the two teachers, four out of seven peddlers, and the four female servants did not own any land. All the others owned small amounts of land. Both the carpenter and the mason were buying small plots in the postwar years, when their business was better than usual. The little grocery store at the center of the village sold candies, cookies, fruit, dry grocery items like salted cabbage, and religious articles like candles and paper money for burning to the spirits. Since this business was very limited, the villagers doing much of their buying in the neighboring town or in the city of Canton, the family owning the store depended upon rent from some land for a part of their income. The seeress worked for a small fee as a spiritual medium, invoking the spirits to talk through her to the living, but she owned a little land; and it was certain that if she had had enough land to live on, she would not have taken up such activities for a living, as her occupation was regarded as degrading and was usually pursued only by the poor in all parts of China. The frog and snake catcher owned two mow of land himself, but he rented them out. Certainly he kept to his poorly paid occupation only because he did not have enough land to assure him a living. The priest had the temple land to support him aside from small donations from worshippers. All the seven peddlers engaged in their trade because of the difficulty of making a living from farming. Two peddled fish, one hawked meat, the others vegetables which they bought from the farmers. The first three peddled in the neighboring town of Pingan Chen on market days and in the surrounding villages on non-market days. They would leave early in the morning, two baskets hanging on the ends of a carrying bamboo pole balanced on their shoulders, trot under the tropical sun hawking their goods from door to door, and return to the village at night. When business was poor, they sought work as farm laborers.

Handicrafts were relatively undeveloped in Nanching. Basket weaving was a common home industry in other parts of China, and here there was excellent material, bamboo, available in abundance, but it was in Pingan Chen that basket weaving was done professionally. Spinning and cloth-weaving, another common home industry in Chinese villages, were done in shops in the southern part of Canton city and in the neighboring Pingan Chen, but not in Nanching. One result of the comparative lack of home industry in this village is worth noting. Whereas ruinous competition from machine-made goods from both Chinese and foreign sources had directly impoverished rural populations in parts of the country where home industry was well developed, its effect on Nanching was only an indirect one. The reduction of handicraft industries in Canton and the neighboring towns created unemployment, thus making it harder for the people from Nanching to find work in towns and cities when it became difficult to make a living at home.

The single home industry of some importance to the villagers was silk embroidery, done by women from late teen age until they were stopped by failing eyesight or old age. This industry was found in about thirty households, including all the "old maid houses" in the period 1949–1951, and the villagers said that there had been more families engaged in it before the Japanese invasion. It was highly skilled work that required long training. A good worker earned the equivalent of 10 to 15 catties of unhusked rice a day, and a less skilled worker earned one-half to two-thirds as much. For a difficult and elaborate piece of work the remuneration was even higher. Payment was by piece rate, and work was not always continuous, depending upon the market. Since it required extreme cleanliness, poor peasant women whose houses were not clean and who had to handle dirt in the fields could not engage in it.

The embroidery was done on a piece of silk, sometimes white and sometimes of other colors, depending on the choice of color for the background by the artist. An artist traced a design on the silk in outline form: flowers, birds, landscapes, historic moral scenes, each to fit the occasion for which the finished piece was intended. Colors to fill the outline were either indicated verbally by the artist or on a colored picture supplied for the embroiderer to follow. The silk with design and instructions was given by the embroidery stores to the embroiderer, who would take it home to work on. The embroiderer supplied her own silk threads of various colors, embroidering needles, and the wooden frame on which the work was mounted.

The finished pieces were used for pillow cases and as pictures to hang on walls, and small pieces were used for slippers, to mention the most common uses. They were bought as gifts for such occasions as weddings, births, a birthday of an important person, the opening of a new store or shop, or moving into a newly built house. Some of these products were marketed locally, but most were exported to Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, and some to the United States. There were half a dozen women in Nanching who turned out beautiful work, and we were amazed by the contrast between the primitive rustic environment, including the simplicity of the peasant women, and the artistic insight which guided their dextrous hands. Despite instructions from the stores, there was still the need for artistic discretion.

In addition to the specialized occupations and embroidery, an important supplementary source of income was the raising of poultry and pigs. Almost every family raised two or three to a dozen chickens. Those who raised only two or three did so mainly for eggs, which were generally sold to egg collectors who came to the village every few days. Only rich peasants could afford to eat the eggs. When the chickens were too old to lay eggs, they were sold at the market in Pingan Chen, and on special occasions like the Chinese New Year they were eaten at home. Those who raised more than a few chickens sold them in the market. Chicken prices had always been high in this area, and in 1948–1951 each catty of live chicken was worth 7.5 catties of unhusked rice. It took an average of three months to raise a chicken to marketable size. At harvest times, chickens picked up rice grains dropped in the fields and on the threshing and drying rounds; ordinarily, they scavenged in the streets and yards for ants and insects and garbage, getting some unhusked rice or rice scraps and chaff as a supplement. Wandering chickens were a part of the village street scene.

Ducks were raised only by a few families because of their special requirements. They were generally raised in large flocks of 100 to 200 and at times even 500. A bamboo shed was erected on the sloping bank of a stream or canal to house them at night. In the daytime they were let out into the stream, where they foraged for small fish and shrimps and floating duckweed, and where they roamed the mud flats and earth embankments for the midget land crabs which formed an important part of their diet. At times, when the midget crabs invaded the paddy fields and damaged young rice plants, a flock of ducks would be let into the field to eat them up. Ducks were sometimes also let into the fields to scavenge for left-over grain. Some supplementary feeding of rice chaff was given occasionally, but not daily. The major cost of duck raising lay not in the feed but in labor, since one person, sometimes a teen-age boy, had to watch the ducks both day and night, and in the erecting of a bamboo shed, renting the land, and buying ducklings from the city. Thus the investment for a flock of ducks was fairly heavy, but, since it normally took only sixty to seventy days to raise them from ducklings to weights of two or three catties for the market, the turnover of the investment was relatively short and the profit relatively attractive.

That only a few families were engaged in this business was partly a result of the restriction of the market. Ducks produced in this vicinity were consumed not only in Canton but were also shipped to Hong Kong and Macao. There had been over twenty families in Nanching raising ducks in the 1920's and the early 1930's, when business in Canton, Hong Kong, and Macao was good, and there was no major disturbance or war to disrupt transportation; groups of duck junks used to anchor on the Pearl River near the village to collect ducks from the vicinity for export. But now these junks were gone. In the postwar years up to 1951, urban buying power was reduced by economic dislocation and widespread unemployment, and transportation and trade with Hong Kong and Macao was disrupted by civil war and by government restrictions on import and export, thus sharply reducing the export of ducks and simultaneously reducing the village's sources of supplementary income. Indeed, the economic position of the Nanching peasants was sensitive to the pulse beat of the greater political and economic situation of the nation.

Like poultry raising, raising pigs was a common source of supplementary income in villages throughout China, and in Nanching about twenty or thirty families kept pigs. Although the pigs were scavengers, garbage in the village streets and rice chaff providing a substantial part of their feed, only one to three pigs were raised by a family, because the regular feed for a greater number would not be within the means of an average peasant. Pigs were generally raised from piglets bought from dealers in Pingan Chen or in Canton, and when they grew to 100 to 200 catties, they were sold to butchers in Pingan Chen or to pig collectors who occasionally came to the village. A sow was sometimes kept for bearing litters and the piglets were sold to other families. Since pork prices were high in this section of the province in 1948–1951, a catty of pork was worth about six catties of unhusked rice, and a live pig of 100 to 200 catties brought a substantial price and gave family finances a needed lift. But aside from the cost of piglets and feed, there was the constant risk of pig epidemics which might completely wipe out the investment. There had been talk about inoculation of pigs by the government against epidemics, but no such program had actually been introduced in this vicinity in the pre-Communist period except for a small-scale experiment carried out by a neighboring agricultural experimental station.

Fish farming was another auxiliary industry in Nanching. There were about ten ponds around the village site that had a good supply of water from the stream and a mud bottom with a cover of water plants. These were stocked early in the spring with fish "seedlings" bought from peddlers. The fish were fed chopped grass and in nine months to a year grew to a length of from eight inches to a foot long and were ready for marketing. Then the pond would be pumped dry and the leaping fish in the puddles caught by small nets or by hand. Most of the fish ponds belonged to the two leading clans, who rented them out to the highest bidder, bidding being held once a year. Because of the investment involved in rent, in the fish "seedlings," and in the labor of collecting good grass and cutting it up, only the middle and rich peasants could engage in this business. It was not an opportunity for the poor, though poor peasants occasionally worked in groups to dam up a section of the small stream in the dry winter and managed to catch some fish and shrimp.

Hard-pressed peasants could earn small sums in temporary occupations which required no capital. One of these was cutting grass from the hillside to sell for fuel; but since hilly land was limited in Nanching, and one could not cut grass that was within the boundaries of neighboring villages, the amount of grass that could be cut was relatively small. Another supplementary occupation was catching grasshoppers to sell in the city for feeding pet birds, but the price was low and the number that could be caught in a day was limited.

All the above auxiliary sources of income undoubtedly helped a large number of families through their financial straits. But many peasants had neither the capital nor the skill for most of these undertakings, and where neither skill nor capital were required, such as in grass-cutting and catching fish from the stream, the situation became one in which "the gruel was too limited for the large number of begging monks." Even the opportunity for farm labor was limited, for only rich peasants and a portion of the middle peasants could afford to hire any sizable amount of help. There was also the competition from the migratory boat people, who worked for lower wages than native laborers.

Credit Facilities

When a peasant was faced with insufficient income to meet absolute needs, when he lacked capital for farming or for an auxiliary enterprise, or when neither supplementary work in the village nor employment in the city was within his reach, he resorted to borrowing. Credit facilities formed an important part of the agrarian economy in Nanching. Poor peasants were not the only group associated with indebtedness; a considerable number of middle and rich peasants also contracted loans. Chen's study of ten villages in the same county as Nanching showed that 51.4 per cent of all the families investigated were in debt, the distribution of indebted families being 48.6 per cent for rich peasants, 52.8 per cent for middle peasants, and 58.9 per cent for poor peasants. The percentage of indebted families was 5.7 for all landlords' families, and 22.9 for agricultural laborers' families.[5] These figures reflected to a great extent the situation in Nanching.

It is essential to keep in mind that the different classes had different reasons for contracting loans. Investigations in Nanching disclosed that the poor peasants generally borrowed to meet immediate pressing needs, such as paying rent and buying food and seeds or fertilizer to keep the family and the farm going. It was common for the poor and middle peasants to borrow to meet critical situations of family life, such as a marriage or a funeral, since the large sum required for such an occasion was beyond the margin of savings of many middle peasants and most poor peasants. In 1948–1950 it took the equivalent of about 3,000 catties of unhusked rice to get a son married, a sum close to the gross annual income of a middle-peasant family and exceeding that of a poor-peasant family. Among middle peasants in a better financial position and among rich peasants it was common to find borrowing for improvement of the farm and for auxiliary production. In 1949 Wong Yu borrowed 600 catties of unhusked rice to go into partnership with another peasant to bid for a fish pond. Borrowing for fertilizer to increase productivity was quite common.

The channels of borrowing varied with the size of the loan and the credit standing of the prospective debtor. For smaller sums, and for persons of good credit standing among friends and relatives, the most popular method was to organize a credit society. This was a national institution prevalent in all parts of China, and the mechanics of it have been excellently treated by Yang Hsi-meng in his book, *A Study of China's Credit Societies* (in Chinese). Fei gave a brief summary of it as follows:

> This society is a sort of savings system, into which each member pays a certain amount at certain intervals and from which he is paid a certain sum on a specified date. The size of the payment to be made by each participant and the time at which he will be paid are prearranged. Anyone in need of money may organize a society by enlisting ten other members. Each will pay a predetermined proportion of the $100 which the organizer receives . . . Thereafter the society meets every six months, usually in March and September, at which time one member receives $100 and the rest make their payments. Members other than the organizer pay sums directly proportionate to the order in which they are paid, so that, in effect, the first five are paying interest for loans they have received, while the last five are receiving interest for money they have deposited. The organizer, on the other hand, repays just $100 during the five-year life of the society and has thus secured a loan without interest. But he is obliged to offer a feast at each meeting and has the responsibility of collecting the money. Furthermore, in case of default by any of the subscribers, he is held accountable. The functioning of this system depends on the invariable discharge of their obligations by the subscribers, and this is secured only by existing ties of friendship and kinship.[6]

The chief advantage of the credit society was its ability to provide a loan at the normal rate of interest without subjecting the debtor to the extortion of private usurers. A person of good credit standing could sometimes organize or belong to several societies and obtain a sizable loan by combining the proceeds from the different societies. The normal rate of interest for a loan in 1948–1950 was about 20 per cent for six months, or about 40 per cent per annum. This was considerably lower than 30 to 100 per cent for six months quoted by Chen for many localities in this province.[7] One reason was the village's proximity to a big city where money was more available than in interior districts.

Borrowing from private lenders was another channel of credit. There were no professional money lenders in Nanching, but there were several in the neighboring town of Pingan Chen. In Nanching rich peasants and smaller landowners as well as those with a little savings to spare would lend money to needy friends or relatives at the normal rate of interest. They were generally not usurers. But lending money or grain to a friend or relative frequently resulted in quarrels and spoiled the social relationship in case of default or delay in repayment of capital or interest or both. Consequently, people with modest savings either kept the money at home or left it with a friend or relative engaged in a sound business for a rate of interest much lower than the normal rate for loans.

Some villagers obtained loans from merchants in Pingan Chen, and a rice mill there frequently made loans in grain to peasants in the vicinity. But making loans was not important with the town merchants, and the borrower had to have very good credit standing. It was not known to what extent the several usurers in town affected the poor peasants in Nanching. Since in our conversations with the villagers we did not hear any talk of usury, as the writer had heard it constantly in talking to villagers in North China, we assumed that this phase of the credit situation was unimportant in the over-all picture of the village.

For the poor peasant without a good credit standing the most common channels of credit were the pawn shop and effecting a temporary transference of his own land if he had any. In both cases, the loan was granted to a peasant not on his credit standing but on the tangible property he could put up as security. The proverbial description of a person absolutely at the end of his means was to say that he "has pawned every article in his possession." There was no pawn shop in Nanching nor was there any in Pingan Chen; but there was one in a village about two miles away which was owned by a big landlord there, and a person who wanted to use a pawn shop could always go to the city where there were plenty of them. Pawn shops' interest rates were high. The one in the nearby village charged in 1948–49 a rate of 20 per cent for every three months, or 80 per cent per annum, and this was comparatively low as against those in some interior districts.

A temporary transference of land to obtain a loan was called *dien t'ien*. The debtor transferred his land to the creditor for the period of the loan. Since the creditor could farm the land himself or could rent it out, no interest was charged. The deed remained in the hands of the debtor, who kept legal ownership of the land. Poor peasants with a small piece of land resorted to this means only when all other channels of credit were blocked, but there were many families in this village who had mortgaged their land this way.

The unfavorable credit standing of poor peasants was a major disadvantage in their efforts to improve their situation by borrowing. This difficulty was augmented by the tradition that "the son must pay his father's debt." In fact, a man was held responsible for unpaid debts contracted by persons within the same household, even though the original debtor had died within a generation's time, the Chinese family being a collective unit of production and consumption. The added weight of indebtedness for relatives reduced the poor peasants' chance of extrication from insolvency, for it was common to find that a poor peasant's father had died leaving unpaid debts. One means of freeing oneself from indebtedness was to work out the debt by performing farm labor for the creditor, a fairly common practice in Nanching for small loans when the creditor could use farm labor.

Channels of Emigration

When farming alone could not provide a livelihood for half of the villagers, when other occupations were not available in the village, and when credit facilities generally discriminated against the neediest of the peasants, agrarian life for the poorer half of the community was bleak and often impossible. While only one case of death from insufficiency of food and malnutrition was observed in the village during the period of investigation, the economic plight of a large number of the poor peasants constantly struggling along with half-filled stomachs and listening to the hunger cries of their children was a common story. For these peasants, the solution lay in going beyond the economically restrictive confines of the village borders.

If the agricultural community of Nanching offered few opportunities for employment, right at hand was the big city of Canton, a city of over a million population, where beckoned a great variety of occupations. Transportation lines led from Canton to Hong Kong, Macao, coastal cities like Shanghai, and yonder to foreign lands like Southeast Asia. And so for half a century after modern transportation came to this territory, the poor and the hard-pressed in Nanching had been going to Canton and to more distant destinations to seek a living. Before the great depression hit this part of the world in 1933 and 1934, there were about one hundred families having one or more members as long-term emigrants. When the cities were hard hit by the depression, the subsequent Japanese invasion, and the postwar inflation and political disturbances, many emigrants were driven back to the village. Now, in 1948–1951, there were only about forty or fifty families having such long-term emigrants.

Emigrants were of two types: seasonal and long-term. Seasonal emigrants were those who went to the city for a few months or shorter periods in a year, generally during slack periods at the farm, and returned to the village when busy farm work called or when city employment was no longer available. Long-term emigrants were those who were away for a longer period, visiting the family in the village from time to time, perhaps once or twice a year, or perhaps at even longer intervals, depending mainly upon the distance to be traveled and the financial means available. They generally returned to the village to spend their old age and to die where their ancestors were resting. Those who had moved out with their families were no longer counted as members of the community.

Seasonal emigrants generally went to Canton, from which they could easily come home to attend to farm work and be close to the family. Their predominant occupation was "selling hard labor" (*mai k'oo li,* hence the pidgeon English word "coolie"). They worked as porters on docks, in warehouses and wholesale houses that needed heavy moving done daily, at pulling rickshaws and carts, at carrying and digging dirt. When the city was being modernized and the streets widened and paved from the 1920's on, there was work in crushing rocks and carrying dirt for roads and building construction; when rickshaws were replaced by pedicabs after the Japanese invasion, rickshaw pullers became pedicab drivers. In this sense, the modernization of the city during the past quarter of a century opened opportunities of employment for many of the villagers who otherwise would have been at the end of their means.

Peddling vegetables in the city also engaged many of the villagers in their spare time. But to carry seventy or eighty pounds of goods on one's shoulders to the city and hawk it from door to door needed as much strength as many of the "hard labor" jobs, and many of the young poor peasants who had the strength to peddle shunned it because of the humiliation that was frequently involved. Wong Mi said, "I don't want the few cents when every time I have to curry the favor of a customer and take his insults with a smile in the process of bargaining. I am poor, but I would rather starve farming than to half-starve peddling." The dignity of this poverty-stricken young peasant was also found in many other poor peasants like him. In fact, there were more women than men who peddled in the city for supplementary income, the women being more accustomed to swallowing their pride.

Long-term emigrants, for the most part, went to Hong Kong. A few went to Southeast Asian points like Indo-China and Singapore, and occasionally a few went north to places like Shanghai. There the dominant occupations for them were peddling, small businesses, shop help, "hard labor," sailing, and, for a few, engaging in large businesses. Generally speaking, there were more Lees from this village who engaged in business and went to Southeast Asia where one could earn more money, and more Wongs who worked at "hard labor" jobs and were sailors. Lee Tou was a merchant dealing in wholesale groceries in Hong Kong, for example; and there were many Lees who became small business men in Canton or Hong Kong. Almost all those who went to work on ships were Wongs. This was chiefly due to the functioning of kinship relations in economic life. One who knew of an opportunity in one's own occupation usually recommended it to a kinsman. A Lee already engaged in business in Hong Kong would hire his own relatives as help or recommend them to fellow businessmen who might need help. A Wong in the "hard labor" business, an activity tightly controlled by secret societies, or in marine work, did the same for his own kinsmen.

There were exceptions to this general division, since an individual, once in the big cities, might get into any occupation on his own initiative or by chance. Wong Yu went to Hong Kong because the few mow of land his father had were not enough to support the family. In Hong Kong he set up a little stall in the market place, selling cooked food. There he even took a wife and lived in a rented shack and was able to send a little money home now and then to his aging father. The Japanese invasion of Hong Kong drove him home, and he had to take up farming, but his modest savings from the city enabled him to buy a little land to add to the family's limited possessions. Wong Hung, whose concubine lived in the village until 1950, was also a businessman, and a very successful one. His father had been a landless tenant peasant, and in his early teens Wong Hung had been taken by a relative to work on a ship. Shifting from ship to ship, he finally landed in Hanoi, Indo-China. There he got a job with a French exporter of jute and jute bags used for packing rice for shipment. He learned French and English and in time established his own business and prospered. One villager said that he was worth a quarter of a million Hong Kong dollars (about $40,000 United States currency at the exchange rate of 1951), and he was then in his mid-fifties. He bought land in the village to support his concubine and her children, and he built a foreign-style house surrounded by a Chinese garden to entertain foreign business colleagues who wished to see rural China.

Long-term emigrants generally sent money home to buy a little land and to keep the family going. No success has been achieved in trying to estimate the amount of such remittances for the entire village, but the effect of remittances on the economic life of the village was clearly visible. Since there were more Lees in business who earned more money than the Wongs, there were more large landowners among the Lees than among the Wongs until the Japanese invasion. Then the trend began to reverse itself, as explained previously. The investment in buying land was a demonstration of the substantial amount of remittances received by the village. But the majority of these landowners kept their families in the village; they were not absentee owners who drained wealth from the village.

There were many emigrants who had permanently drifted away from the village. Wong Ho, who died of malnutrition, had a son engaged in a small business in Shanghai. This son went to Shanghai with his father in the 1920's and took a wife in Shanghai, but unlike his father, he did not return. He did not even send money home to his aged father. There were large landlords who had migrated to Canton and Hong Kong permanently, using city earnings to buy land in the village and taking rent from the village to re-invest and spend in the cities, a process which worked to the impoverishment of the villagers. Families B and C belonged to this type, and Family A belonged more to this type than to the type of occupying owners. Young sons of large landowners and rich peasants tended to remain permanently in the cities where they received their education. The Japanese war forced two or three of these young educated men to return, and they took up farming. But this was clearly due to circumstances, and not their own choice. Lee Chan-piao, the son of a returned emigrant from Hong Kong, had a high school education in Canton and had worked in the city as a clerk in the municipal government for some years before the Japanese invasion. He had returned to operate his father's farm of about twenty mow and two fish ponds. His livelihood was above the average in the village, and he had married a city girl. But his constant desire was to return to the city as soon as there was an opportunity of employment, a desire that was encouraged by his city-bred wife. He was a typical product of the effects of migration and the widening gap between urban and rural life in China.

Surveying the broad picture of emigration, it is significant that it was the city and not another village which provided a destination for temporary or permanent exodus. The urban centers in this respect operated as a safety valve for the hard-pressed elements in the countryside and for the overstrained agrarian economy. On the other hand, when the urban economy was plagued by a depression or disrupted by political and military disturbances, the unemployed or otherwise economically dislocated persons could return to the village where their kinship roots lay and where the soil would provide subsistence until times became better again for them to return to the city. The urban and the village economies thus helped each other regain balance when either was struck by a crisis. This was possible partly because the commercialization of agriculture had not developed to the extent of destroying the substantial degree of self-sufficiency of the agrarian economy, a self-sufficiency that insulated the village life from being too deeply affected by spreading influences from the dislocation of economic life in the city.

The Question of Pre-Communist Change

Had the economic situation of the village always been like this, at least in the past half century? What changes had taken place in the economic life of the community in recent decades? And was the lot of the majority of the villagers better or worse compared to fifty years ago? While there is no statistical data on these questions, we can summarize some of the known facts in order to throw limited light on these questions.

Land, the basic means of livelihood, had been expanding very slowly by encroaching upon the river, but the limit of such expansion had been about reached under traditional agricultural techniques and organization. Methods of cultivation had remained the same as long as living villagers were able to recall. Contacts with improved methods had been extremely limited, and new ideas, such as the effort to introduce a new weeder that could raise the efficiency of weeding per person at least five fold, had been vigorously resisted because of the villagers' doubts of their value. The only new elements in agricultural technique found in Nanching were the occasional use of chemical fertilizer and modern insecticide applied with sprayers. But the villagers thought that the chemical fertilizer's fertility did not last as long as night soil, city garbage, and soya bean cakes; and modern insecticides were beyond the means of the common peasant. Consequently, the influence of these innovations on the village's economy had been negligible.

The basic system of land ownership had remained the same, and old villagers recalled no major change in the general rate of rent charged by owners. There might have been some change in the period of land tenure, for old villagers talked of five-to-ten-year periods which no longer existed; but it would seem that, if there had been a general shortening of tenure, frequent bidding would have pushed up the rent rate.

It has been mentioned that the clan land of the Wongs had been reduced, which might have meant a certain increase in economic difficulties with the Wongs, many of whom were tenant farmers; but we could not be certain about the trend in the distribution of ownership of private land over the past half century. Chen's study of ten villages in the same county indicated a tendency toward concentration of land ownership from 1928 to 1933. Although it was not possible to tell to what extent this was applicable to Nanching, it was a fact that the possessions of Families A, B, and C, the largest owners, represented acquisitions within the past half century. Before the rise of these families, there had been at least one large landlord family. In the 1860's, a prospering middle peasant, Lee Ch'ang, bought an increasing amount of land and sent two of his three sons to school. One of the sons passed the provincial grade of the imperial examinations, became an official, acquired wealth and expanded his family land to over 100 mow around 1890. But by the time of the Republican Revolution (1911), the entire family had moved away to the city where the grandchildren squandered the family fortune and became poor. In the 1930's, the last of the family land was liquidated. There were no records to show how many large landlords there had been in former times or the extent of their aggregate possessions of land as compared with the present situation. Certainly the instances of decentralization of land ownership in recent years were wartime phenomena which did not represent a long-term trend in the past half century.

There had been one discernible change in land ownership in Nanching. The expansion of the city economy in the last fifty years had attracted large numbers of emigrants from this village and, in turn, increased the amount of land bought by their earnings. Although the majority of such purchases were small plots, their total effect would be to reduce the ownership of land by the tillers of the soil; and the process of increasing holdings by emigrants who acquired capital in the city explains to some extent the high percentage of tenancy in the village, the development of absentee ownership, and the removal from the village of rent to the equivalent of the total yield of some 170 mow of land, 14 per cent of the total cultivated area — a possible factor in the deteriorating economic position of many peasants in the village. All these were typical phenomena in a village so near a big city, phenomena that had long attracted the attention of students of rural problems of modern China.

There had been gradual changes traceable to the growth of commerce in general in the past fifty years. There had been little change in the economic character of the rice crop, but the villagers thought that vegetable acreage was greater than forty or fifty years ago, an observation apparently substantiated both by the sizable amount of vegetables, particularly leeks, produced in the village and exported to Hong Kong and Macao and by the growth of population in Canton, which must have increased the local need for vegetables. The development of the Hong Kong market and the growth of Canton, both new facts in the past half century, had unquestionably influenced the whole economy of the village. The growing of jasmine before the depression, the raising of ducks, and handicraft embroidery were in part results of modern commercial developments that reduced the self-sufficient character of the village life and increasingly integrated it with the economy of the outside world. That integration was visible in the machine-made cloth that the villagers generally wore, in the shoes they bought, and in the kerosene they burned in their lamps instead of soya bean oil.

In any attempt to visualize the effects of pre-Communist change, it is essential to recall the political vicissitudes of the local and national situations over the past fifty turbulent years. Civil wars, particularly in the 1920's, when they came as regularly as the seasons, had meant the disruption of transportation and markets for agricultural products; they had meant the kidnapping of young peasants as carriers of military equipment and supplies for warlord soldiers even though the village escaped destruction. There had been many changes and depreciations of currencies accompanying the changes of government resulting from the civil strife. In the early 1920's, nickel coins were issued to take the place of the old ten-cent silver pieces; later the nickel coins were decreed void, and peasants who held them suffered a complete loss. The old twenty-cent silver coins were constantly cheapened by the reduction of their silver content. The steady depreciation of the copper coins, continuing from the early 1920's until the time of the Japanese invasion in 1937, and caused mainly by Japanese smuggling of counterfeits, caused a considerable long-term loss for the peasants, whose small transactions left them with sizable quantities of depreciated copper coins. The most severe losses in the 1920's were from repeated annulments of the many paper currencies issued by the ephemeral provincial regimes. Many peasants held such paper money as savings. There was a repetition of these tragic experiences in the wartime and postwar inflation of the CNC (Chinese National Currency) and the Gold Yuan of the Nationalist government. Since Nanching, being near a great city, had long been a part of the monetary economy, the monetary disorders of the past half century had repeatedly wiped out a part of the savings of its people. The peasants, slow at the shell game of the money market, many a time woke up to find their savings depreciated or totally worthless.

The villagers, who traditionally viewed the past as better than the present, all said that life was harder these days than in their forefathers' time. We had no accurate basis for a statistical comparison of the present village economy with that of former periods, but there were two features of the village which seemed to confirm the villagers' view.

The first was the houses. They were generally built of bricks, many with one- or two-foot stone foundations above the ground. Almost all were at least forty to fifty years old and although the brick and stone work of many of them still stood strong, within one often found rotting timber unrepaired and unreplaced. It was plain that they had lacked proper maintenance by the occupants for the past ten or twenty years. A sharp contrast was found in the flimsy quality of all except a very few of the newer houses. The houses of Families A and E, built within the last thirty years, matched the quality of the old houses; but the new houses in all other cases were inferior. One family of rich-peasant status had built a house in the early 1940's. Although it was a brick structure, the bricks were of poor quality, the brick laying was poorly done in irregular layers, and the timber was cheap local soft wood. It had no stone foundation; it looked shabby compared to any of the average old houses. At the eastern end of the village, where many old houses had been burned by Japanese troops, there rose from the ruins unsightly shacks of thin wood planks, with a few cheaply built brick houses scattered among them. Since houses in a Chinese village represented the savings of the villagers, the difference in the average quality of the old and the new houses in Nanching appeared to symbolize a decrease of savings and a general deterioration in the economic welfare of the village.

The second feature we noted was the appearance of the ancestral halls or temples. The main ancestral halls of both the Wong and the Lee clans, with their extensive stone foundations, their fine bricks, their elaborate ornaments of carved brick, wood, and plaster, the mural paintings, the great hard-wood timbers of the pillars and roof joists, the spacious stone-paved yards, and the massive effect of the whole structure, were still inspiring sights. But the villagers said that the building of such structures would be quite beyond the means of the present generation; and, in fact, the ancestral halls of the Chen and Chang clans, which had been burned by the Japanese, had not yet been rebuilt, despite the fact that being without an ancestral hall meant being without a collective symbol of the clan. The many small ancestral halls set up by the subdivisions of the clans of the Wongs and the Lees were in poor condition; the timber had been allowed to rot and the roofs left to leak without repairs. Such neglect was not because of the descendants' lack of interest but was brought about by the lack of means. Here again was another indication that the economic condition of the village as a whole had deteriorated compared to that of half a century ago.

CHAPTER VI

Kinship System

THE LIFE of a peasant community like Nanching was characterized not only by its agrarian economy but also by the prominent place of kinship relations in its social structure. Since the family functioned as an organizational unit in agricultural production, and in turn, occupation on the soil was uniquely conducive to the development of strong and stable kinship ties, agrarian life was in a large measure woven out of the social fabric of kinship relations; and the peasant was more kinship-minded in his dealing with the social world than any other section of the Chinese population.

Dominance of the Kinship System

The dominant position of the kinship system in this as in other village communities stemmed especially from the immobility of the agrarian population. As already pointed out, the population of Nanching was mainly the result of biological multiplication within several clans. Generation after generation of kinsmen had continued to live on the same spot and pursue the same occupation, agriculture, until their number had reached that of a sizable community. The lack of occupational diversification in the agricultural economy and the insulating character of subsistence farming fostered a uniform mode of life, enhanced intimate economic and social co-operation, restricted population mobility, and furthered the internal cohesion of the lineage group, the kinship organization.

The lack of diversified opportunities of employment, characteristic of an agrarian economy, forced sons to follow in their father's footsteps, a process which had gone on for over thirty generations for both the Wong and the Lee clans, until the population in the village had become firmly integrated into the form of kinship groups. From cradle to grave, one did not leave the rigid ties and intimate influence of one's own kinsmen. Traditional values had been fully developed to orient the individual's attitudes and sentiments ever toward the family and the clan and their economic foundation on agricultural livelihood. A son with wanderlust was told, "Pleasant are the thousand days at home, but difficult is even half a day spent on the road." "Li hsiang pei ching" (to leave one's home community and to turn away from the family well) was the classic lament of the traveler or of one who was forced to seek a living in the "cold and harsh outside world." In Nanching, kinship relations represented the paramount force tying the individual into a tightly-knit organization beyond which he contracted few direct and intimate social bonds. If familism and clannism characterized Chinese society in general, it was in this part of China that they were most fully developed and well maintained.

Familism and clannism were visibly built into the physical plan of the village. The houses were grouped by clans so that each clan occupied a distinct section of the village, and each section was separated from another by gates. Even families of each subdivision of a clan were generally concentrated on the same street or alley. Interclan rivalry was intense, sometimes flaring into open conflict. At such times, children of one clan did not dare to play in another clan's territory.

The kinship structure consisted of the clan, the clan subdivisions, and the individual families. The "Great Ancestor" (*t'ai kung*) or original male settler of the Lee clan had five sons; each married and propagated in this village. All male and unmarried female descendants of the Great Ancestor were constituents of the clan. The descendants of each of the five sons constituted the membership of a subdivision, a *fang* or house. The Lee clan had five subdivisions, and the Wong clan had four, all residing in the village. Under each subdivision were the individual families.[1] Due to the expansibility of the Chinese family system, there was in theory no rigid limitation on the size of the family. Classical principles prescribed intimate family relations among descendants from a common ancestor within five generations, as expressed in mourning and other ceremonial obligations, the participation in which served as important identification of family membership. Families consisting of members of five generations living under a common roof were by no means unknown in China, but in Nanching intimate family relations functioned among the members of three generations who held common property and carried on common consumption and production. In a poor family having several married sons, one of them would live with the parents while the rest set up separate households, thus creating a three-generation family and several two-generation conjugal families counting the married sons' children.

Within this web of kinship relations an individual was born, received his physical nourishment, mental development, initial social status, assistance in his career, aid in his unfortunate moments of unemployment and disability, support and comfort in his old age, and burial upon his death. Encouragement for his descendants to offer sacrifices to his spirit when he was gone was meant not so much to take care of him in the other world as to perpetuate the family tradition in this one. No stronger bond between man existed in his social consciousness. And many of the extra-familial social relations were projections of the family relations, symbolized, for example, by appellation between friends, which included a large number of kinship terms such as elder brother and sister, younger brother and sister, and "senior uncle" (elder brother of one's father). In our field investigations we used such terms to foster the good will and friendship of the villagers.

Functional Factors in the Family System

As a highly integrative system, the family organization functioned by devices that tended to identify the status, the interest, and the sentiments of the individual with the integrity of the organization. To prevent the development of individual interests from disrupting the solidarity of the family group, emphasis was laid upon the ascriptive aspect of the status of the members. Both the integrative and the ascriptive aspects were among the important structural factors that enabled the family system to function successfully.

Marriage and Divorce

Marriage, an event critically affecting the structural form of the family system, might mark the breaking of the younger generation into independent family units, thus reducing the size and ending the organizational continuity of the parental family, or it might add new members to the parental family, increasing its size and its ability to maintain an organized continuity through successive generations. Marriage in Nanching, as in other parts of China, was oriented toward the second objective, and the means to achieve it was the practice of arranged marriage which embodied strong integrative and ascriptive features.

In this practice, the parents chose mates for their children and made all important decisions concerning their marriage, which was taken as a family matter under the dictate of the head of the family and not as an event designed exclusively for the interests of the marrying individuals. The classical purpose was to perpetuate the patrilineal family, to beget male offspring who would perform the ancestral sacrifice, to continue the "smoke from the incense," to obtain a daughter-in-law to serve and help the parents, and to establish a growing family with earning power for the security of the parents' old age. Should a son balk at being married or at the parents' choice of a mate, he was reminded that this marriage was not his business but that of the parents and the family.

The procedure and ceremonies of traditional marriage were designed both to prevent the married son from breaking away into a new family unit with his wife and to integrate the bride, a stranger, into the intimate life of the husband's family, to whose authority she was subjected thereafter. The traditional idea of fate in wedlock, the paying of a ceremonial price for the bride, the dwarfing of the significance of the marrying individuals by the accentuated symbolism of the family and the broader kinship group in all the ceremonial acts and elaborate feasting, and the ever-present element of ancestor worship in every stage of the wedding procedure all impressed upon the marrying parties and others at the scene the importance of familial continuity as a basic purpose of the whole costly and elaborate event.

In Nanching and in other villages in this province, marriage ceremonies for a son consisted of two parts, one being performed within the immediate family and the other in the clan. In the second part the new couple offered sacrifice to the ancestors in the main and subdivision ancestral halls, and the family provided one to three feasts for all members of the clan. It was this part of the ceremony, along with the ceremonial price for the bride, that constituted the major expense in the marriage of a son, totaling about 3,000 catties of unhusked rice in Nanching and its vicinity in 1948, more than a year's income for a poor peasant. The whole expense was usually borne by the groom's parents. It was this sum that frequently sank the entire family of a poor peasant and many a middle peasant into financial insolvency; but the expense, huge when measured against the average family's wealth, was an important factor that bound the marrying individuals to the family and subjected them to family authority.

The traditional arranged marriage was still the dominant institution in Nanching in spite of its propinquity to Canton, where a family revolution against the ancient system had been raging for half a century. During the past decade there had been a few marriages through free individual choice of partners and romantic love, but without exception these were returning emigrants who brought their wives home from the cities; and even in these cases the traditional wedding ceremony was repeated in the immediate family as well as in the clan in order to gain recognition for the marriage from the community. In one such case, the wife, a city working girl, was very insistent that the traditional wedding ceremony should be performed in the village in spite of the husband's objection to the high cost of the feast for the clan. The original wedding in the city having been a simple private affair attended by only a few friends, the woman was plainly concerned about the lack of formality in her marriage; and in her mind it was the elaborate ceremony and the clan feast in the village that would give public witness, recognition, and security to her status as wife at a time when the marriage law of the government was hardly known to the common people.

The vast majority of the marriages in the village were monogamous. Polygamy was traditionally permitted on the formal ground of obtaining male heirs in case of failure by the wife to bear a son, but it was also a practice that permitted a man to make up for the loss of romantic experience in his arranged marriage. As polygamy required the husband's ability to support one or more additional women and the children they might bear, it was obviously beyond the economic means of the poor and middle peasants. The polygamous families were those of large landlords, except one which was that of a rich peasant who was also a local politician. Except for the concubine of one rich peasant, who had been a girl from the "boat people," in all the cases investigated the concubines had at one time been prostitutes bought from their owners in the cities. Wong Hung's concubine had originally lived with him in Hong Kong, but his wife had been jealous and mistreated her badly; so he brought her to the village to live, visiting her a few times a year. Since the concubines behaved properly in the village, observing the strict rules of sex segregation and refraining from associating with male villagers, they all enjoyed good status as members of rich families.

The practice of exogamy based on surnames deserves brief attention here. Men and women bearing the same surname might not marry, although marriage to maternal cousins was permissible. The national tradition of surname exogamy might have had some significance for the community life in Nanching aside from the eugenic nature of the problem as discussed by writers on other occasions. Under this exogamous practice, parents in this village usually had to go to neighboring clans within a radius of five to ten miles to get a bride for their marriageable son. The resulting marital bond had the effect of broadening the social ties of the villagers and creating contacts and relationships which constituted a part of the existence of the larger local community beyond the confines of a clan or a village. Without this, the high degree of economic self-sufficiency in the village as a unit and the strong and exclusive character of the clan organization might have resulted in the development of mutually isolated clannish communities, with frequent armed conflict between them.

Formal divorce was not known in this village. A wife mistreated by her husband or his family often returned to her own parents for varying periods of from a few months to many years, sometimes for life. But such action did not constitute a formal divorce in the modern sense of the term, for both sides still had claims against each other as husband and wife in spite of the physical separation. Aside from the lack of institutional recognition of the right of divorce, any permanent severance of a matrimonial tie was difficult for the wife because of the lack of women's property rights and means of self-support, social discrimination against remarriage of divorced women, lack of rights to take the children with them, and possible mistreatment of the children left with the husband's family. For men, the lack of the right of divorce in the old tradition had less serious implications than in the case of women. Men held superiority over women in formal social status, and they were the sole possessors of family property. Armed with these two major weapons, some men did mistreat their wives, beating them into submission if necessary. Wife beating was not common in this village, but it was by no means unknown. On the other hand, there were many hen-pecked husbands in this community. But they were deviants from the institutionalized pattern of roles within the family, as shown by the common feeling that there was something "unnatural" about hen-pecked husbands, who were always the subject of jokes.

The underlying principle governing divorce was that, just as marriage was not the result of individual wish and choice, so breaking a marriage was not a matter for the individual to decide. With supreme emphasis upon the integrity of the family, there could only be adjustment and sacrifice of individual interests for the benefit of the family; and the absence of divorce as a means of adjustment of individual interests even in cases of irreconcilable domestic conflict was especially marked in this village as compared to the city.

However, as just pointed out, there was the not uncommon practice of long-term separation when the wife returned to her parents' home to live; and there were several such returned wives in Nanching. As a rule, they belonged to the "old maid" houses, usually good, clean brick houses with three or four rooms each, where the majority of members spent their days chatting and doing some handicraft like embroidery and returned to their own parents' homes to sleep. Only the homeless slept there. Three types of women constituted the membership: separated wives, widows, and a few unmarried women. Separated wives and widows belonged there on the theory that once a woman was married to another family, she belonged body and spirit to a family other than the parents' and after her death her spirit could not return to the parents' home. In case of alienation from her husband's home, her spirit must have another home to attach itself to in order to avoid the tragedy of becoming a homeless wandering soul. An "old maid" house represented a home for the spirits of such women. Should death draw near a member who was living in her own parents' home, she was moved to the "old maid" house to die, so that her spirit would know where to return. There was always a little altar in each house where carved wooden tablets of deceased members were placed in rows. Religious sacrifices were offered on the death anniversary of each member by those living. It was apparent that "old maid" houses were pseudo-families intended to maintain the moral, spiritual, and material value of the family for those who had broken loose from family ties.

Age and Generational Levels

In the integration of successive generations into an extended kinship system, the status arrangement of a large number of members became a structural matter of paramount importance. The kinship organization here as elsewhere in China operated mainly by a system of status ascribed on the basis of age and generational levels which to some degree transcended sex differences. A kinship member's form of behavior and allocation of material benefits in relation to those of another member were partly determined by age and generational factors. Within the same generation, older members took precedence over younger members; members of a senior generation took precedence over those of a junior generation. Since every individual had a certain age and belonged to a generation, this scheme offered a practical device for clearly establishing the status of every member in a kinship group whether it consisted of a small family or of a clan with 10,000 members.

The operation of the system was aided by the differentiation between the lineal and the collateral relations, the rigidity of one's status regarding age and generational differences being greatest with close kin. Based upon generational levels and upon the factor of lineal or collateral descent, the *Ta Ch'ing Lü Li* (Laws and Regulations of the

Ch'ing Dynasty) distinguished forty-one different groups of kinship members, each group designated by distinct kinship terms.[2] Within a group, each member was designated by an individual term based on sex and age, age being arranged numerically by the order of birth, such as "first elder sister" or "third elder brother." These terms were used by kinship members in addressing one another. Although older members and those in a senior generation usually addressed younger ones and those in a junior generation by individual names, proper kinship terms were used in mentioning junior members to a distant relative or to a stranger. As each of the forty-one groups of relatives might consist of one to over ten members, the total number of kinship terms that an individual must learn to recognize was very large. One American reader of the chart of kinship terms suitably remarked, "We don't even recognize the vast majority of these people in our culture, to say nothing of having a specific term of address for each one of them." Learning the complete system of kinship terms constituted an important part of a peasant's training to fit him for social life in a kinship-oriented community.

In Nanching it was the effective operation of this complicated system of kinship terms that enabled each individual in the kinship group to identify his own status, to assert his authority or to offer his obedience, to exercise his privilege or to fulfill his obligations with regard to the distribution of material and nonmaterial benefits. It was the ability to identify each individual's position which enabled the Wong and the Lee clans, each with over 400 members, to function as an orderly organization. In general, the Confucian canon of maintaining a "proper order by age" still guided the social relations in this village.

However, although the observation of filial piety and the reverence for age were lessons instilled in the minds of the villagers from early childhood by nursery stories, folklore, school texts, themes in novels and operas, and social pressure, the observation of "age hierarchy" as a tradition had not remained strictly intact during the recent decades. The village's proximity to the big city and the large number of emigrants returning periodically or permanently to the village had been channels of entry for the general spirit of the modern age characterized by the rising status of the young and their rebellion against "oppression" by the age hierarchy.

In the late 1930's there had been armed conflict in the village between a young group and an older group, with several elders from both the Wong and the Lee clans taking part. The fight was for the control of an organization connected with the right to collect crop-protection fees. The villagers were reluctant to talk about the details of that internal conflict. They consistently blamed it on the unruliness of the young, but they also expressed the opinion that, if the older generation had been able to retain the full respect of the younger members of the clans, it would not have occurred. Whether the villagers' opinion was right or wrong, the incident was indicative of the modern trend away from the established system of status and authority based on age and generational levels. To the young, the world was changing, and the scene of change in the city was near enough to influence them. Although the continuation of traditional life in the village still sustained a measure of respect for the old, the new forces which were dooming traditional life in the cities were beginning to be felt by more and more young people in the village.

The age hierarchy was still strong within the intimate families in the village, being supported by the function of the family as the basic production unit in an agricultural economy, the father's leadership in production activities, the maintenance of the parents' property rights, and in most families, the children's dependence upon the family economic organization. Among poor peasants, where family property was negligible, the family production unit too limited for even the subsistence of the entire family, and children had to shift for themselves at an early age, their economic self-reliance might diminish their filial respect. Whereas Wong Yu, whose family was a financially comfortable one, was filial toward his aged father, Wong Mi, the poor peasant, was known to have beaten his old mother and to have been rebellious toward his father. But even in the case of Wong Mi's family and others of the same class, the father still exercised a substantial amount of control over the son because of the traditional influence of filial piety and because of village group pressure directed against the rebellious son.

Filial piety, being limited to the parent-child relationship, contributed directly toward the effectiveness of the traditional family organization but not to that of the extended kinship system. Thus the general decline in respect for age and generational levels, even though it did not yet seriously threaten the family, caused a loss of organizational strength of the clan. It was indicated in Nanching in the increasing lack of control over the young by the older generation and by the fact that collective action by the clan was now more difficult than a generation ago. The diking of the "new enclosure" land had long been urged by the elders, but it was undertaken only when extreme need for land became obvious.

Women's Status

The stratification of status by sex was an important factor in the functioning of the traditional family and the larger kinship group. In a patrilineal and patrilocal kinship system, it was to be expected that there would be general dominance by men in all essential aspects of kinship functions, and that women would be placed in a subordinate role.

Woman's status in Nanching, as elsewhere in China, could be viewed in two stages, the premarital stage as daughter and the postmarital stage as wife and mother. A daughter's economic value to the family was lower than that of a son, since her economic tie with her parents' family was severed by marriage and her marriage required a dowry, which often exceeded the bride's ceremonial price paid by the husband's family. For the majority of the peasants who constantly struggled between hunger and a half-filled stomach, the lower economic value of a daughter cast a shadow over her status in the family and accounted much for the general attitude of discrimination against the female infant. However, there was little discrimination in treatment between a girl and her male siblings during childhood. One saw little girls eating the same food, wearing clothes of the same quality, and playing happily with their male siblings and other boys in the neighborhood. They enjoyed the usual superior status over younger brothers on the basis of age seniority. It was fairly common Chinese practice when financial tragedy befell a poor peasant's family when the daughter was about ten or twelve years old for the parents to sell her into indentured slavery as a "slave girl" and spare the boy in the family, such a girl not regaining her freedom until she was married; but during the period of our investigations we did not find any families in Nanching who had sold their daughters.

Under normal circumstances, a young daughter enjoyed a respected status and a warm life in the family, but in the clan she was not treated as a full-fledged member. She was not given a portion of pork from the pigs used in the annual sacrifice to the Great Ancestor, which was the symbol of full-fledged clan membership; nor was she entitled to a share of clan land, which was available for rent only to each male member, as previously described.

When a girl was married, the husband's family was careful to see that she severed all economic ties with her parents' family, particularly if she came from a poorer family. She entered the husband's family as a stranger and remained more or less in that status until she became a mother, especially the mother of a son. Since until then her husband was discouraged from showing her any strong affection and from taking her side in case of conflict between her and the parents-in-law, even her husband was somewhat of a stranger to her in her initial period as a wife, and the dominance of the parents-in-law was often absolute. After the birth of a son, she was accepted as a full-fledged member of her husband's family, and her security increased. As the son grew up she relied upon him as an ally, often more so than upon her husband, for the protection of her rights and privileges. When her parents-in-law died or retired into inactivity, she became domestic master of the household, although her decisions were always subject to the veto of her husband who, with the mature son, had economic control of the family.

The pre-motherhood stage as a wife was normally the most difficult period in a woman's life. The husband's family had the institutional right to send her back to her own parents' family on many traditional grounds, including alleged loss of virginity before marriage and the failure to bear a son. Although such action was infrequent, and no instance of it was discovered in this village during the course of our investigation, the threat was ever present. She enjoyed no rights to her husband's family property; and her own personal possessions, such as individual savings, clothes, or ornamental jewelry, were usually of insignificant value. Whatever her feelings, the fact that she could not get a divorce and the occupational limitation within the visible confines of the small village community were compelling reasons for remaining with her husband's family despite unpleasant treatment.

The wife had one appreciable form of protection against mistreatment from her husband and his family — her own parents' family and clan. Since marriage was the joint affair of the two families, domestic quarrels between husband and wife might develop into a conflict between the two families. A wife's parents might visit the husband and his family members to demand that they cease the mistreatment or to seek redress for a wrong. If the wife's family was poorer or weaker than the husband's and such action would be ineffective, and the wife's cause was an obviously just one, the wife's clan might intercede and the issue would become a point of contention between the two clans. In the Wong's printed copy of their clan genealogy there was a rule forbidding male clan members from marrying any girl of a Chen clan in a village about three miles away, the result of a conflict between the two clans caused by the mistreatment of a Wong girl married into the Chen clan.

Close as Nanching was to the city, a center of law and government, legal protection for the individual was not well developed here; and it was only the matching force of related kinship groups that helped to assert and maintain the legitimate status of an oppressed family member.

Economic Structure

We are interested here only in those salient features in the economic structure of the family which directly affected the organization of the family as a basic unit of social relations in Nanching.

Farms were without exception family enterprises. The grocery store, the masonry shop, and the carpentry shop in the village were all family enterprises. Consequently, an individual's livelihood depended almost solely upon his membership in the family, particularly for minors and women. Even emigration of a mature son to the city would not entirely free him from economic control by the family as a unit of production, unless he severed all his family ties or became so successful in his urban adventure that he established another family unit of production in the city. The majority of emigrants eventually returned to the family fold in the village and resumed their place in the family.

The family unit of production was normally led by the male head of the family, either the father or a mature son, except in the case of widows with only young children. The head of the family decided on the means of employing the available family resources, decided what crops to plant in a certain year and with what investments, and commanded assistance from family members available for work. He was the main laborer who did the heaviest work. Women participated in almost all types of farm work except the heaviest, such as plowing; and the children's part in production was determined by their ability in varying stages of their maturity. The work of the women and children received no separate remuneration; and women's household activities were never regarded as a part of production work in the family's effort to acquire an income. Women were not admitted to the professional types of handicrafts such as carpentry and masonry.

The land, tools, house, and liquid capital were regarded as collectively owned by the family, but their disposal was generally decided upon by the male head of the family; in the case of a widow's family with minor children, the female head of the house would make the decision. Deeds to the land and house generally bore the "hall name" of the family, not the name of individuals. Individuals including females might have savings and other private property apart from the family property, and the head of the family normally had no right to such individual properties. A concubine in one of the landlords' families, for example, saved enough money given her by the husband to buy a small house in the city from which she collected a modest monthly rental. The house was bought in a "hall name" that she had adopted for herself. She kept the rent thus collected, and she could sell the house with no interference from the husband. However, with the majority of the peasants, the small family property was all that was owned by the members. Upon the death of the husband, the widow became the guardian of the family property, but she could not sell it against the will of a mature son.

Family property was generally not divided as long as old parents, the heads of the family, were still living. Upon the death of the parents, inheritance was divided among all sons, with the eldest son getting a larger share as the succeeding ceremonial head of the family in officiating at the rites of ancestor worship, and the other sons receiving theoretically equal shares of the remainder, which, however, was at times adjusted on the basis of need occasioned by the number of mouths to feed. Daughters, married or unmarried, had no right to inherit family property. The Nationalist government decreed an inheritance law in 1930 permitting daughters to inherit family property equally with sons, but this law was not generally observed even in the cities, and in Nanching the villagers had not even heard of it. This system of property ownership and inheritance gave full support to the system of status based on age and sex factors, and the dividing of the inheritance among the sons contributed directly to the smallness of the farms and the scattering of the plots. It can be seen here that family organization was deeply and intricately meshed in the economic life of the family and the community.

The Clan and Its Subdivisions

Organization and Functions of the Subdivisions

The organization of the clan subdivision was rather informal. The oldest member of a subdivision was generally regarded as the head, and he managed the affairs of the subdivision together with other elders in it. Should a subdivision possess property such as land or an ancestral hall, either an administrator or a council of management was elected. Affairs of the subdivision consisted mainly of performing worship rites for the subdivision ancestor, interceding in inter-family conflicts, and keeping unruly elements within the subdivision under control. In an inter-family conflict elders of the subdivision were frequently called upon to arbitrate before the case was taken up on the clan level. Elders were frequently asked to reprimand a young deviant or a wayward son within their own subdivision in case the immediate family should prove ineffective in restraining him. The subdivision generally had no power to mete out physical punishment; this was reserved for the clan. Kinsmen in the same subdivision generally regarded their mutual relationship closer than with those in other subdivisions, and mutual help was more active within the subdivision.

Since the clans in this village were relatively small — the largest of them, the Lee clan, consisted of less than 600 persons — direct contact between members of a clan was fairly intimate and frequent, and it was facilitated by the close congregation of the houses of the members. Consequently, the function of the subdivision in integrating kinship members into an operating unit was relatively less important. The subdivision ancestral halls in Nanching were rather idle, with few activities going on as compared with the main ancestral hall of each clan. In other localities in the province where a clan in a village contained thousands of members — as for example, the Chen clan in Chen Tsun, about forty miles down the Pearl River, which had over 10,000 members all residing in one village — the functions of the subdivision became important because of the lack of frequent, intimate contact between distantly related members in the same clan. In a broad sense, it might be said that each of the clans in Nanching was a subdivision of the large clan whose Great Ancestor first settled elsewhere in the province.

Organization of the Clan

The clan was directed by the council of elders and the business manager. In principle, the council of elders was the center of authority that made all important decisions concerning the affairs of the clan, and the business manager administered its financial activities under the supervision of the elders.

The council of elders, who served without compensation, consisted of males over sixty-five years of age. When a man reached his sixty-fifth birthday, he gave a big feast to the entire clan in order to qualify for council membership. Should this celebration be beyond his means, his close relatives might contribute money for the feast. A generation ago, as related by the villagers, the subdivision to which an old man belonged would sometimes give the feast for him should he be too poor, and the money would come from the subdivision treasury and contributions from close relatives. Now that the subdivisions were generally quite impoverished, such collective aid had not been given in the past three or four decades. The requirement of giving a feast for the clan had the actual significance of making wealth as well as age a qualification for council membership. In fact, there were several poverty-stricken old men in the village whose age was well above sixty-five, but who had never sat on the council of elders.

The business manager was elected once every three years, and in the case of the two large clans, the Wongs and the Lees, an assistant was also elected to serve with him. The manager was usually a man in his forties or fifties and at least well enough educated to be able to keep accounts. Wong Yu was the manager for his clan during the period of our investigation. The election was divided into two stages, the selection of candidates and official recognition of the result. In the first, prospective candidates for the office would make their contacts with the elders and with socially active clansmen. Usually, only two or three candidates would be active in the field, and the contest was not too complicated an affair. As a rule, the issue of who should take office was all settled in pre-election consultations, and the election itself was only an official recognition of the result. One might remark at this juncture that the Communists regard this process of informal consultation as an important element of grass-roots democracy and have come to make wide use of it in the form of "consultative meetings" and "consultative conferences" as a means of settling differences previous to any formal voting or election which is only of nominal character. Such meetings and conferences have become a part of the standard procedure in the Communist "new democracy." Herein lies a certain degree of institutional continuity between the traditional system and the Communist social and political structure.

The election, usually held in the evening in the main ancestral hall, would be announced by someone beating a pair of brass gongs through the streets where the clansmen lived. Only men attended, the traditional age requirement for a male being sixteen, with no other qualifications; but usually only a part of the clan's male adults, probably one-fourth to one-third, attended. All council elders would be present, and they would suggest the candidate for the office of business manager, who might be the current incumbent ready to serve another term or a new man. There was no formal rule excluding new nominations or suggestions from the floor, but this did not usually happen since major differences in the choice of a candidate had been settled previously. Active men in the clan as well as the elders would take turns recommending the candidate, and the election would accomplish its formal purpose by having public recognition from the members of the clan. There was no procedure of balloting or showing of hands here, although balloting was practiced in some forms of Chinese organizations elsewhere, particularly in the city guilds.

For administering the clan's financial affairs the business manager was given a modest compensation on an annual basis, usually two or three hundred catties of unhusked rice, which was not enough for one person to live on. Clan business was fairly complicated. The manager had to manage the clan land and other clan properties. He had to see that the ancestral hall was kept clean and in good repair. He had to manage the business aspect of the annual ancestral sacrifice ceremonies, one in the spring and another in the autumn. He had to participate in the business management of other events of the clan such as a community opera held once a year for the local patron god when the harvests were good and when there were no economic or political disturbances. For major expenditures, it was usual for the manager to hold consultations with and obtain approval from the council elders. For all expenditures, detailed accounts had to be written down. At the end of the year, each item of account, the purpose, the date, and the amount expended had to be separately written on an oblong slip of red paper and posted on the walls of the main ancestral hall for all to inspect. At that time of year the walls of the ancestral hall would be plastered with hundreds of red slips fluttering in the wind, and one would read such items as 5,000 catties of unhusked rice for the support of the village school, 1,000 catties for the repair of a caving wall in the ancestral hall, two catties for the manager's transportation to the city to see some official on clan affairs, three catties for tea to entertain a visiting official who came to the village on a certain date. People who questioned any item of the account could bring it up with the council elders and make it an issue in the next election of a manager.

We did not hear any charges of corruption in the village during our investigation, the accounts being too exposed to public scrutiny and social contacts in the clan being too intimate to hide any major items of expenditure. In Nanching, owing to the smallness of the compensation, the lack of any appreciable side-income deriving from the office, and the considerable amount of time and energy demanded by the work involved, there were not many aspirants for the job. Usually the candidate came from a literate middle-peasant family and needed a modest supplement to his limited family income. Large landlords and most rich peasants were rarely found in this position.

Besides the council of elders and the business manager's office, other agents might be set up in the clan to administer special affairs like the village school, a community opera to celebrate a patron god, or a major event like the building of a dike. The personnel in such bodies were generally appointed by the elders after consultation with persons active in village or clan affairs. Ordinarily, however, major events like building a new dike called for a clan conference held under the guidance of the council of elders to appoint personnel and lay down policies, in much the same fashion as the election meeting where leading differences had been threshed out beforehand in informal consultations. It was in the behind-the-scene consultations that the rich and the powerful members of the clan exercised their influence.

Functions of the Clan

The most regular and visible of the clan's leading functions was the worship of ancestors. The ancestral hall, the prominent and elaborate building that towered above the village houses, was devoted primarily to this purpose. Once in the spring and again in the autumn, sacrificial ceremonies were held in the ancestral hall, attended by most of the members of the clan. Additional sacrifice was offered at the time of the Chinese New Year. Roast pigs and other foods in dishes were placed on the long, carved teakwood sacrificial table in front of the altar on which were placed the ancestors' tablets. Candles and incense were burned. The elders led the ceremony of "kneeling three times and bowing the head nine times," and the younger members followed in rows in the order of generational levels and age. On such occasions the entire ancestral hall was swept clean, strips of red cloth were draped over the altar, and paper and cloth decorations bedecked the doorways and walls. Huge lanterns, their paper covers renewed and repainted, were lighted with big candles. The golden characters on the numerous hanging wooden plaques were cleaned and polished. Some of these plaques were old imperial decorations bestowed by emperors and local officials upon worthy sons of the clan, and some were couplets carved either with moral epithets or praises of the clan. The walls and pillars were decorated with plaques which gave moral advice to members of the clan and reminded them of past accomplishments of their illustrious predecessors. When the ceremonies were performed in this massive and elaborate building amidst such an atmosphere, in contrast to the usual drabness and monotony of village life, members participating in the scene could not fail to be impressed and inspired by the glorious past and to be proud of the present unity and strength of the clan and feel sentiments of loyalty toward it. Less elaborate ceremonies were occasionally sponsored by individual families in the ancestral hall in the event of a wedding or the birth of a first son.

Participating in such a ceremony, the individual member felt that he was not alone but a part of a large group united by the unseverable tie of blood. If the clan was an abstract image and a state of collective feeling in his daily existence, now the clan was presented in concrete visibility, in full flesh and blood, demonstrating to him the numerical strength and historical pride of the organization of which he felt himself a part. The honorific decorations and the inscribed lines of moral admonitions and social ambitions from the ancestors that bedecked the ceremonial scene reminded the living congregation of clansmen of their obligation to preserve the heritage and to measure their daily conduct against it. Thus the whole ceremonial process had the effect of lifting the clansmen's feelings and thoughts above the level of individual existence and integrating them into the unity and continuity of the group.

Another vital function of the clan was the enforcement of social and moral order among the members. Conflicts between individuals or families (usually a conflict between individuals would involve the respective families) that could not be resolved independently by the parties involved were normally arbitrated by the council elders. Simple cases were first handled by the elders of the clan subdivision to which the conflicting parties belonged. Failing that, individual elders in the clan were called upon to arbitrate. In serious cases, such as those involving serious bodily injury or property damage, the council of elders would sit in session, frequently accompanied by other clansmen active in village affairs, to consider the case, attempt reconciliations, or mete out punishment to the guilty party. A generation ago corporal punishment for the unruly young was not uncommon, but such action had not been taken in the recent two or three decades — one of the signs of the weakening of clan power.

Should the parties involved reject the arbitration or decision, they could legally take the case to court, but such action required money and official connections, and only the rich could afford to follow this course. For the majority who could not afford recourse to law, the clan's decision was binding, being supported by group pressure of the clansmen in general and by strong and rich elements in the clan in particular. Consequently, formal government and law had little to do directly with the life of the majority in the village.

The same methods were employed to deal with violation of mores and law. Both the Wong and the Lee clans had special moral rules written in the genealogy book for the clansmen to observe, and the authority of the clan was used to enforce them. In recent decades, the enforcement by the clan authority of such written rules and unwritten mores of the community had fallen into increasing neglect. When Wong Mi beat his mother, he received only a reprimand from the elders in his clan subdivision; and, for all we could see in his behavior, he was still as rude to his old mother as before. The villagers insisted that such infraction of filial piety would have been severely punished a generation ago. Again, although the rules in the Wong's genealogy book specifically prohibited gambling, quite a few members of that clan were habitual gamblers, and the elders simply ignored them.

The general group pressure of the clan was still sufficiently effective to preserve good order in the village, and in recent years there had been no cases of burglary, theft, fights involving serious bodily injury or property damage, divorce, or serious infractions of the mores of the kind which filled the pages of city newspapers. During the period of our investigation we rented and furnished a house for our field workers to live in. The house was often unoccupied for days with the doors secured only by a flimsy padlock. Nothing was ever stolen from the house, poverty-stricken as the villagers were. This did not mean that there were no bad elements among the villagers, but that moral pressure from the elders and other clansmen forced them to carry on their activities elsewhere. So long as they refrained from practicing their art within the village, both the elders and the clansmen left them alone. In a neighboring village there were several notorious bandits, but their own clan left them alone since they did not bother the people in their own village. The clan was a small and tightly knit we-group, and law and order found effective enforcement through clan authority without formal government.

As a we-group, the clan performed the function of protecting kinsmen against injustice from outsiders. We have noted the prohibition of marriage with the Chen clan as an example of such protection for the female members of the Wong clan. The clan also deterred invasion by bandits and other lawless elements by its own armed defense organization. The clans in Nanching possessed some firearms, and there were many individual villagers who possessed firearms of their own and would normally respond to the call of the clan for the protection of clansmen against outside invaders. Armed villagers had fought a battle against Japanese soldiers after killing a Japanese who had raped a village woman. The leadership of the Wong clan was an important factor in organizing the villagers for the combat.

If lawless invaders were from a nearby village, the clan would approach the invaders' clan and press for a settlement. Since hostilities frequently led to bloody feuds, the clan tried to restrain its unruly members from bothering neighboring villages. Thus, while Nanching was only two or three miles from a village harboring many notorious characters, it had never suffered any trouble from them. In this situation of "armed peace," the effect of maintenance of peace and order by the clan went considerably beyond the sphere of the clan itself. Since there was no effective police force in the vicinity, and soldiers were called out only in major disturbances, the daily maintenance of peace and order depended greatly upon clan influence. In many localities in this province, particularly in the mountainous districts, the armed force of the clans was so strong that government tax collectors frequently dared not approach the villagers directly.

Economically, the clans in Nanching were not very active; but on special occasions the clan played a vital economic function for its members, such as building the dike for the "new enclosure" and organizing the distribution of the resulting benefits to the clansmen, and in case of flood, the whole clan's manpower was mobilized to repair or reinforce the dikes on the land belonging to the clansmen. When the Wongs formerly had more clan land, its low rents were of important assistance to a large number of poor clansmen. With the Lee clan, a part of its sizable income from clan land located elsewhere went into relief for the aged poor who had no earning capacity. The village school was supported mainly by contributions from the clan incomes of both the Wongs and the Lees.

Inter-clan Relationship

Since, as already noted, Nanching was a multi-clan village, with two major and three minor clans, the nature of inter-clan relationship was vital to the life of the village. To maintain co-operation between the clans, there was an inter-clan council of elders composed of representatives of each clan. The size of membership was not rigidly fixed; generally, two or three elders were sent from each of the two major clans and one from each of the three minor ones. This council met only on such occasions as the apportionment of contributions to a special levy made by the government or to undertake projects that involved the entire village. An example was the building in 1936 of the motor road that passed through the northeastern corner of the village land. It was the inter-clan council that decided upon appropriate shares to be paid on the levy made by the government, according to the amount of land that belonged to the members of each clan. Then a wide road was built from two of the village gates to the new road so that motor vehicles could come to the gates, the expense being shared among the five clans as decided by the inter-clan council. During the Japanese invasion the council met frequently to work out common measures for the protection of the village.

Private relationships between members of the various clans were generally friendly and peaceful. Occasionally, there was firm friendship and even organized relationship among individuals across clan lines. In the teahouses in Pingan Chen during noon teatime one frequently found a group of individuals from several clans all sitting around the same table. In the village there was at least one fraternity organized by members of the Wong and Lee clans which had a high degree of solidarity. On one occasion, when one of the fraternity members was arrested by the government, the others tried every means to get him out of detention in spite of the danger of being involved in the case.

On the other hand, inter-clan rivalry was keen. Asked what he thought of several Lees, a young Wong said, "All the Lees have 'heart trouble,' " meaning that their minds worked differently. There were instances of personal animosity between members of different clans. Generally, the Lees, with greater wealth, looked down upon the poorer Wongs. On the other hand, the larger size of the Wong clan was a source of strength and pride. And both the Wongs and the Lees looked down upon the three minor clans because they were poor and numerically weak.

The rivalry between the Wongs and the Lees found one form of expression in the annual community opera which each clan presented for the celebration of the birthday of its own patron god. On this occasion, there was a traditional practice of firing rocket firecrackers. Each firecracker shot out a core high into the air, and the clansmen raced for it as it dropped to the ground. The winner would have good luck, and he was given a prize. Since all the prizes were displayed in the ancestral hall and their quality and value were taken as a criteria of clan prestige, each clan pressed its members to donate as valuable prizes as they could possibly afford. In 1949 on such an occasion the Lees displayed prizes which included, in addition to varying quantities of unhusked rice, an expensive battery radio set, a modern-style chest of drawers, and several modern table and chair sets. Such expensive modern articles, rarely seen even in landlords' homes, brought the total value of the prizes to the equivalent of 5,000 to 6,000 catties of unhusked rice. The poorer Wongs could not match this sum, so they did not have any celebration for their own patron god that year, much to their humiliation; but they promised a bigger one as soon as they could afford it.

Whether as units of co-operation or rivalry, the clans so dominated the collective life of the village that an individual without clan membership was socially isolated and looked down upon; his children could not attend the village school without paying a higher rate of tuition; he and his family would be only on-lookers at the grand ceremonial events that periodically broke the monotony of village life and imparted joy and a sense of belongingness to the participants. He might eke out a living in the village as a craftsman, a farm laborer, or even a tenant farmer, but his chance of attaining distinctive economic success was slim, for he might not easily buy land and he was not deeply trusted by his fellow villagers in case he should need a loan or other forms of economic assistance.

There were about ten families in Nanching who did not belong to a clan. They had drifted in as war refugees in the 1940's and lived on the fringe of the village, although empty houses were available inside the village; they all engaged in peddling and served as occasional farm laborers for subsistence. The natives did not regard them as leading the normal social life of the village, an impossibility without clan membership; but in the traditional process such outsiders, should they stay and multiply for several generations, might gradually acquire land, develop a clan, and attain the status of other clan-affiliated villagers.

CHAPTER VII

A Decentralized Power Structure

WE HAVE seen that the tight-knit structure and the multifunctional character of the family and the clan made the kinship system a highly autonomous and self-contained unit of collective existence, and that inter-clan co-operation was an important factor in making village community life possible. But beyond the village lay the larger concentric circles of local, regional, and national communities of which the village was a part; and both in integrating the individuals and kinship organizations within the village and in linking the village to the larger communities the systems of power were the decisive factor.

Power is regarded in the present study as the ability to induce compliance from others in the making of group decisions and in conducting collective activities. Power has to be structured in order to operate in any collectivity, but the power structure may be formal or informal. A power structure assumes a formal character when it is institutionalized into formal hierarchies of regulated authority. An informal power structure, on the other hand, is not ordered into well-defined levels or exercised through formal rules but operates by a spontaneous balance between the various power individuals or groups. In both forms, the sources of power lie in physical force, wealth or social status, and prestige.

In the public life of Nanching the formal power structure was represented by the system of central government which tied the village to the national political community, while informal power was embodied in the structure of community leadership; and the two systems were interdependent.

Formal Government

The Republican formal political structure consisted of the central government, the provincial government, the county government, and the subdistrict (*ch'ü*) offices which were the operational agencies of the county government. It can be said that in practice the system of formal government stopped at the county level, a county in China having on the average about 200,000 to 300,000 population and 200 to 500 villages, and that, traditionally, the village community was not a formal unit in the central government system. To increase the effectiveness of governing such a large population with a scantily staffed county government, there had developed the system of collective responsibility, or *pao chia,* rooted far back in Chinese history, especially in the "new policy" of the Sung prime minister Wang An-shih (1021–1086). Since Wang An-shih's time, for eight centuries the system had been alternately practiced and abandoned in response to the demands of historical situations.

In the Republican period, political order within the county functioned mainly through the informal local community leadership, with the county government as the supervising agent; and the village stood as a highly autonomous self-governing unit. In 1932 the Nationalist government revived the collective responsibility system. The ostensible purpose was to use it to tutor the population in self-government in preparation for democratic constitutional rule, but the actual objective was to use the system to combat the spreading of the Communist movement in the countryside.

The system was based on the family as the primary unit of collective responsibility for the proper and law-abiding conduct of all its members. Ten families formed a *pao,* and ten *pao* formed a *chia.*[1] In this particular locality, several *chia* formed a *hsiang,* sometimes called an administrative village, a unit usually composed of several villages, and the *hsiang* was subordinated to the subdistrict (*ch'ü*) office of either the county or municipal government. The subdistrict office was usually a part of the county government, but since the vicinity of Nanching belonged to the Greater Canton metropolitan administrative area, the subdistrict office was under the municipal government. From the municipal government the line of political authority traced upward to the central government. It was through these levels of organization that political authority reached down from the national capital to the individual families in the village.

In Nanching there were twenty-three *pao* and two *chia,* both of which formed a part of a *hsiang* of five villages with headquarters in a village about two miles away. The subdistrict office was located in Pingan Chen. In terms of population, the *pao* unit here was composed of about 50 persons, the *chia* of slightly over 500, and the *hsiang* of about 6,000.

Organizationally, each family sent a representative to elect the head of a *pao,* and the heads of the *chia* and *hsiang* were each elected by the respective constituting representatives. The headship of these units of collective responsibility was thus set up by indirect election which became official only after the government had added its formal appointment. The chief of the subdistrict office was directly appointed by the municipal government (by the county government for territories beyond the municipal area) without even the formality of indirect election. Under this system, the line of authority was from the top down, the head of each unit being responsible not to the constituents below but to the superior chiefs above. *Pao chia* therefore took on the nature of being an extension of the centralized bureaucratic system.

Being such, its main function was to assist the government in the administration of law and the execution of policies, and it did little or nothing to develop local welfare or to foster decision-making by the people through the democratic process. Concretely speaking, the head of each unit was held responsible to the superior chiefs for the good conduct of all constituents and for transmitting government orders to them. He and the entire constituent membership were held collectively responsible for anything that went wrong, and especially for harboring any illegal elements in the locality, the crime of one individual theoretically bringing punishment to all. As a part of routine function, the head of each *pao* unit reported regularly to the superior chief on births, deaths, marriages, movements of his constituents, and any unlawful activities found among them. He helped the tax collector to collect taxes, and in wartime, with population records in hand, he aided in conscription.

Facts show that, from its revival by the Nationalist government in 1932 to its termination by the Communist conquest in 1949, the system accomplished little in the Nanching area with respect to either its ostensible or real functions. With the family as the basic collective unit responsible to the superiors for law and order, the individual member had no direct role or active interest in the operation of the system. Devised essentially for facilitating the flow of central authority down to the village and family level, there was no genuine popular participation in the functioning of the units. After seventeen years of its existence (1932–1949) in this village, the villagers had gained little knowledge of democracy and the democratic process of self-government, the declared purpose of the revival of the system.

As already suggested, the real motivation behind reviving the system was to utilize local social groups to combat the spreading of the Communist movement. In the light of historical events, the effectiveness of the system in this direction is doubtful. During the summer of 1949, for example, when the Communist armies were driving down toward Kwangtung Province, several meetings on the *hsiang* level were held among the *chia* heads to transmit the government order to the *pao* and *chia* units, instructing them to be serious about ferreting out any hidden Communist underground elements in the vicinity. So far as known, there was no Communist underground organization in this village or its immediate neighborhood. But the rapid Communist victory attested to the failure of the system in stimulating political loyalty among the people for the Nationalist government and generating popular morale to combat the Communist revolution toward which the village as a whole showed general apprehension.

During the war against the Japanese invasion, the system here was unable to perform the function of assisting the government in military conscription, Nanching being occupied by the Japanese army during the early part of the war. In the unoccupied territories, this function at times caused the system to degenerate into an organized racket of shaking down the people by selling the privilege of exemption from conscription and by drafting those unable to pay.

The system's performance in assisting the government in the collection of taxes was no more effective. In 1948 and 1949, prior to the Communist victory, when tax collectors came frequently to the village to press the peasants for generally overdue taxes, the heads of *pao* units were called upon to assist in the matter. The heads guided the tax collector to the right door but rendered no further help. Since the tax collector was a traditionally hated figure in agrarian communities, the *pao* heads did not wish to become identified with him.

The control of criminal and disorderly elements was a major traditional function of the collective responsibility system, but its usefulness in this respect was also negligible. The general prevalence of peace and law in this village and its vicinity was due to social control by the kinship system and the local informal power structure, not to the operation of any formalized system of collective responsibility. During the Republican period, open gambling and opium smoking were alternately permitted and suppressed in the big city. During the periods of suppression, gambling houses and opium dens would mushroom in the suburban villages, including Nanching. The system of collective responsibility did nothing to suppress them. Corruption of the officials was of course one factor in the situation, but since this factor operated in the city also, a further explanation must be sought to explain the fact that the favorite hiding place for bandits and illegal traffic was not the big city, where the impersonal social milieu provided an easy cover for lawless elements, but the intimate rural community where primary group pressure was strong. One explanation is that the system of collective responsibility, the only agent of formal government in the village, was not effectively integrated with the local agents of social control. Another is that the informal power structure was not averse to occasional gambling, limited illegal traffic, or even harboring bad elements among kinsmen so long as they did not disturb the local peace.

Our conclusion is that the national government failed to substantially alter the traditional decentralized pattern of local government in which the village political life operated largely by its own local power structure and was but weakly integrated into the system of central authority. One reason for the failure was the variance between formal law and local mores. Lack of interest and knowledge in formal government on the part of the responsible personnel was another; the heads of *pao* and *chia* units were generally untrained in government affairs, and they received no remuneration for their services; many heads of *pao* units were illiterate peasants, and the others barely literate, incapable of reading any elaborate government documents, the essential communication links in the operation of an extensive system of central authority. We were told by the villagers that one *chia* chief, having over 500 people under his charge, had been an illiterate — obviously the kind of man who in an uncompensated position commanded little respect from the community and could not make the power of his office felt; and during the period of our investigation, only one *chia* chief was a man of influence in the village. Generally, men of wealth and power in the community shunned such posts.

Then there was the factor of structural incompatibility in grafting the family as a basic unit to the formal system of central authority. As a part of the kinship system, the family was of a particularistic nature, while formal law and government operated on the universalistic principle in order to produce a national political order out of heterogeneous groups. Conflict between the particularistic and universalistic systems was seen in many instances of defective operation of the *pao chia* organization. On the *pao* level, the leaders representing families had not risen above family interests and identified their position with the interests of the state, a condition plainly evident in the lack of sincere interest in helping with tax collection, conscription, and other official duties. On the higher *chia* level, where the unit comprised 100-odd families often distributed across the clan boundary, inter-clan conflict made smooth operation of the organization difficult. One *chia* leader in Nanching, Lee Feng, always had trouble in getting co-operation from the member families under him because many of them belonged to the Wong clan, which had traditional conflicts with his own clan.

The particularistic nature of the village as a localistic communal structure contributed similar difficulties to the functioning of the *hsiang* unit. Nanching always had had conflicts with a neighboring village some two miles away, but the two villages were lumped together in the same *hsiang*. It was clear that co-operation between the two villages could not be expected so long as vital interests based on the village communal units remained unaltered, and that if, for instance, one village insisted upon the suppression of gambling in another village, the action might well end in a feud. (The difficulty in the operation of the collective responsibility system across family, clan, and village boundaries was common to other parts of China, Fei noting the same phenomenon in his Yunnan study.[2]

For the peasants, the village was a self-contained little world in which most of them were born, lived, and died; and only what happened in this litle world aroused their intimate interest. They had a sound knowledge of such happenings and the ways in which they were handled organizationally, but since contacts between leaders and the members were close, any elaborate hierarchy of authority was unnecessary. In fact, the homogeneous nature of the agrarian community and the relatively simple and tradition-bound character of agrarian life rendered formalized laws and regulations both superfluous and uncomprehensible to the peasants.

Moreover, they had almost no knowledge of national affairs. So long as the village was keeping its peace and order, they were not deeply interested in the state's attempt at suppressing the Communist revolution. Having litle notion of national political issues, they did not know the reasons for taxation beyond the vague impression that it went to feed government officials. The ability to "talk about the affairs of the state" was the distinctive mark of a few, usually the village scholars or gentry; and in Nanching, among the 1,100-odd population, such men were extremely few. They included Lee Feng, a village leader to be mentioned later, a dozen or so returned emigrants from the cities, several large landlords who had acquired wealth mainly through underworld operations, and a few businesmen who owned land in Nanching but were no longer resident members of the community and took no active part in its public life.

It should be noted that ignorance of national affairs did not necessarily mean unawareness of the existence of a higher political entity than the village and its immediate vicinity. The Nanching peasants knew concretely that there was a class of people called officials or rulers who had little contact with them and whose power was not derived from playing a role in the local community life. They knew concretely that the power of these officials was traditionally used to maintain peace, order, and justice; that when robbers plundered their homes, it was the officials' duty to apprehend the criminals; that in case of gross mistreatment by other fellowmen beyond the limit of the local mores one way to redress the wrong was to go to the subdistrict government in the neighborhood, where judicial and administrative powers were not differentiated. They knew that above the subdistrict officers were higher authorities to whom they could appeal their case – although the average individual did not know where the municipal or county government was located, and did not know the procedure of appeal. In other words, the common peasants were fully aware of the existence of officials as a ruling group, but they had very little precise knowledge of the organization and operational procedure of formal political power. In fact, the peasants' vocabulary contained the word "official" but not the term "government"; they spoke of government merely as *kuan fu,* or the house of the officials.

The common peasants were also aware that beyond the village and its vicinity lay a greater political community. They were conscious of the existence of cities, of counties and provinces, and even the nation, but they had no precise knowledge concerning their location and area; and they had no clear idea as to how large was the outside area under one political authority or how their village was related to the greater world.

It might be added that the limited and vague knowledge of government and of the greater political community contributed toward the peasants' sense of inferiority and submissiveness to the officials who ruled the wider world, a sense so characteristic of the peasant as a human type, as Robert Redfield pointed out.[3] For the power of those outside forces was visibly demonstrated in the village by the periodic pressure of the tax collectors and the subdistrict officers, and by the intrusion of armed soldiers into the local area at times of regional and national upheavals. It would seem that the *pao chia* system of collective responsibility might well have brought the greater political world nearer to the peasants, but its structure and functions were such that apparently the peasants had no more understanding of it than they had of the system of central government as a whole.

Local Power Groups and the Informal Political Order

The Nanching peasants were fully aware of the structure and operation of the political order in the local community; and although there was no formal hierarchy or set of rules governing the positions of the individuals and groups who commanded compliance from the local population, there was a traditionalized acceptance of their informal power arrangement.

The clan had a strategic position in the maintenance of peace and order in the village not only because it executed public projects such as the construction and repair of roads, the diking of the river, and the operation of the village school, but also because its possession of firearms represented physical force. The Wongs and the Lees each had about a dozen old rifles. And there was always the fundamental clan power derived from the institutionalized acceptance of the clan's authority by the kinsmen and their dependence on the clan for many of their social and economic needs.

There were also sources of power over which the clan had imperfect control at best, among them the families of wealth; for wealth in Nanching also meant physical force. Family A was an example. Rich, having 120 mow of good land and some business in the city and employing many workers in the village, Family A was a large family with two married sons living under the same household, making a large group under its direct command. It possessed many firearms, and its strongly built house resembled an armed castle. One morning we heard a burst of machine-gun shots and found that it was Family A testing a submachine gun it had just purchased. The clan elders normally consulted such families before making any important decisions about affairs of the clan, since any decision made without their approval or support would be difficult to carry out. If any wealthy and large family exercised its power so obtrusively that it aroused general objection from a majority of clansmen, including other wealthy and large families, the clan might act to counter its power with the collective strength of the clan including that of the other influential families.

The Crop Protection Association was a third power group in Nanching. It had been organized by about twenty individuals from the Wong and the Lee clans, its stated function being to guard mature crops against theft, and its members possessed arms. It levied a charge of five catties of unhusked rice on each mow of crop, with a promise to pay indemnity to the owner of the crop for any part of it stolen. Practically every farming family had been compelled to pay the fee. We did not discover any case where an indemnity had been paid, but the villagers were satisfied that there had been no major crop thefts in recent years.

For protection from bandits from the outside, members of the association made connections with the local underworld. To establish such connections, some members belonged to local gangs of racketeers. The head of the association and his brother were such men, but many members of the association, including the secretary, were respectable villagers. The head of the association was also involved in the operation of opium dens in the village and in gambling undertakings in Pingan Chen; and he had been a member of a "navigation protection corps," an armed group sailing on ships navigating the Pearl River and its tributaries through bandit-infested territories. Since in such adventures the corps usually made previous arrangements with bandits in various sections of the navigated territory, paying them a certain sum for leaving the protected ship alone but fighting any gang trying to molest the ship, the head of the Crop Protection Association was well prepared for his local job. In a situation where the subdistrict government police force was small and ineffectual, the association performed the actual function of maintaining peace and order in a limited sense; and some of the members were participants in guerrilla warfare against the Japanese during the occupation period.

These three power groups, the clan, the powerful families, and the Crop Protection Association, functioned fairly independently of each other. The authority of the clan was vested with the council of elders, and, although other groups or individuals might influence the council's decisions, they could not invade its membership. Wealthy and large families did not belong to the Crop Protection Association or participate in its racket. The association membership consisted of one rich peasant, several middle peasants, and a majority of the poor peasants. The secretary was a rich peasant, but the head of the association was a middle peasant who farmed about ten mow of land, of which he owned six mow, performing the greater part of the farm labor himself. We saw him pumping water from a pond into his field, but there was little doubt that he derived his main income from crop protection fees, as his food and clothing were those of rich peasants and he had built a new house after World War II.

Another group possessing elements of power were fraternities with a cross-clan membership, of which there were many in the village which took active part in village affairs, their decisions and action carrying weight in the community. Each fraternity was composed of men of similar age from different clans – in other words, a peer group. It did not usually initiate new members much younger or much older than its existing members, and it passed out of existence when its members died, since younger men started their own independent fraternities. Thus, the fraternity was not a self-perpetuating organization, and could not develop into extensive organizational systems such as the fraternal orders in the United States. Nevertheless, since a new member performed a religious ceremony and gave a feast for the other members so as to cement their pseudo-kinship relation with the spirits as witness, and all had usually grown up together in the village, the degree of solidarity of such a group was high.

One purpose of the fraternity organization was mutual aid; at a member's wedding the brothers would be present to make merry and to prevent jokers from unduly molesting the bride, and we found that fraternity brothers often gave each other financial help or engaged in common enterprises. Four brothers in a fraternity jointly rented a fishpond in 1949 and raised fish. Aside from such mutual-aid functions, a fraternity with its solidarity often became a power group when it had members active in village affairs, especially when it had money and guns. A fraternity did not exert its influence as an open organization but through its members' participation in village organizations. In one fraternity, for example, one member was the business manager for the Wong clan, another member occupied the same position in the Lee clan, and several others were in the Crop Protection Association.

There was an athletic club in the village called the Lion's Club, because it had a paper lion that the members used for a lion dance like the dance one sees at Chinese festivals in American Chinatowns. Its membership included teen-age boys and young men in their early twenties, with a sprinkling of middle-aged men holding the leadership. An instructor was hired to come every three or four days to teach the members to play the paper lion, to beat rhythm with the drum and gongs and cymbals as accompanying music, and to give lessons in the old military art of shadow boxing, using swords, knives, spears, and other ancient weapons. Although such military arts had no place in modern combat, they were regarded by the villagers as traditional forms of physical culture for the young, and lion's clubs were very common among workers in the cities and among peasants in the villages in this province. Of the some thirty or forty members in this club, the vast majority were sons of middle and poor peasants.

Since such an organization dealt with physical exercise that once was an ancient military art, it occupied a certain position in the local power structure. On several occasions the older leaders of the club had used the organization to fight for their own interests or to claim a share of interest for the organization. Some years previously they had meddled in the crop protection racket but failed in getting a share of the protection fees. Under ordinary circumstances, membership in the club provided some sort of protection against injustice from bullying villagers.

Lastly, although the traditional gentry no longer existed in Nanching, there were individuals who filled a similar power position in the community. The traditional gentry was clearly defined by the qualification of having passed at least the lowest grade of the imperial examinations, which gave a man the privilege to enter county and provincial government offices and to see officials and thus gave him power as an intermediary between the government and the common people. In the Republican period, imperial examinations were discontinued. Nevertheless, the traditional power of the old gentry was maintained until about 1920 in this province. Up to that time, old scholars still were the main group that had the privilege of approaching government officials directly on private or community matters. But from then on, an increasing number of officials emerged from the new educational system, and old scholars with an imperial examination degree were rapidly thinned out from the officialdom by senility and displacement by the new group. The new officials did not restrict their contact with the common people to the scholars, but their visitors included rich merchants with little formal educational background, and at times even notorious elements. Wealth and public influence, instead of formal scholastic success, became the criteria of who could approach government officials directly. Hence, merchants, large landlords, and local politicos took the place of the old-style scholars as the intermediary between the government and the people under the Republican political order which did not change the traditional dichotomy between the ruler and the ruled.

This process of change was fully visible in Nanching. The village had two persons of the old-style gentry background still living. One had moved to the city some decades ago, but one still lived in the village during our investigation. He was Lee Ying, a man in his mid-sixties, who had a *hsiu ts'ai* degree, the lowest degree granted by the imperial examinations. Up to about three decades ago, it was he and several others like him who went to the county magistrate's office to negotiate business concerning the community or individuals in the village. Traditional respect for scholarship and the accessibility to government officials gave him a position of prestige and power in the village, and few decisions on community affairs were made without consulting him. With the frequent changes of regimes in a period of revolution, he knew the officials less and less, and they spoke increasingly in new terminology about foreign ideas quite beyond his comprehension. In our conversations with him, he expressed contempt for those new officials who spoke "a mouthful of new terms," regarding this as a sign of degeneration of the age as compared with his good traditional past. But one could well imagine that the quotations from the Confucian classics which characterized his speech was just as irksome to the new officials with their modern educational background who regarded him as a representative of a dying age.

This ideological difference between the old scholar and the new official not merely cost the former the strategic intermediary position in dealings between the government and the people, but it also abolished his old function as a supporting agent of formal government. When the traditional government stopped at the county level, it was the old gentry who used their position as community leaders to help maintain peace and order in the villages and towns which were without formal government. Furthermore, while governmental power relied heavily upon physical coercion, physical force alone could not long maintain political stability without a system of moral justification. The Confucian theory of government and its supporting ethical norms provided such a justification, and old scholars like Lee Ying made this justification effective by constant teachings of Confucianism to the villagers, particularly the young. As late as 1951, Confucian concepts were still strong in the minds of the older villagers, and Lee Ying retained a measure of respect among them.

But the larger political setting had been profoundly altered by a series of revolutions, and the government that the village must deal with was dominated by a new group not inspired primarily by Confucianism nor rigidly bound by Confucian canons in their official conduct. Consequently, for some three decades, Lee Ying neither visited the county magistrate's office, nor did he earn any money writing official petitions for litigating parties, who would now rather pay a modern lawyer in the city for such services.

The new group that had risen in the old gentry's place was much less homogeneous in composition and less well-defined in status. In Nanching during the 1920's and 1930's, the one person who had rather free access to local officialdom was the head of Family A. At that time, the locality was under the rule of a military commander who had once been a bandit leader, "a hero from among the grass and thickets," who by surrendering to and joining forces with different early Republican regimes in the province had become a political and military figure of considerable importance and came to exercise unchallenged domination over this locality, his home village being only two miles away from Nanching. His influence extended to the level of the provincial and, in a limited way, the central government. The head of Family A had been one of the commander's underlings in his "grass and thickets" days and, according to the villagers, had acquired some wealth from banditry as well as from opium traffic. He had transferred his capital to legitimate import and export business in the city. With wealth and good political connections, he enjoyed a high prestige in the village; he could see the commander, his old boss, any time he wished, and through the commander, could see other officials in the government. There had been another personage in the village like him, an underling of the same commander in his dubious days and later a substantial citizen of the village, but he had moved to the city. Neither of these men had any formal education, and both were nearly illiterate; yet they came to enjoy direct official contacts like the old gentry whose channel to prominence and power was through scholastic attainment. Needless to say, these two men, "with not one drop of ink in them," had no political ideology to teach the villagers in support of the power structure of the government except the silent message that these were times when the strong man won regardless of class background or moral conduct.

Two rich merchants, neither of them residing any longer in the village, had direct contacts with officials in the subdistrict and higher governments. One of them had donated a large sum of money to set up the new elementary school and had it legally registered with the municipal government in Canton so that its graduates might go on to public middle schools with proper recognition of their academic standing. But their dealings in village affairs had become extremely infrequent, especially in recent years.

One man who approached the characteristics of the old gentry was Lee Feng. His father had been an old scholar with modest means, and he himself belonged to the rich peasant class. He had graduated from a middle school in the city, had been in Hong Kong, and therefore had breathed the air of the modern urban world. Now, in his mid-forties, he resided in the village and was very active in village affairs. He was a member of the fraternity controlling many organized activities, and a representative to the council of the *hsiang* government. He had once been a member of the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) and a minor officer in the local party branch. He was extremely eloquent in private conversations as well as in public speeches, and he could chair a meeting with dexterity. Looking at his peasant's clothes and his always shaggy and unshaven face, one would not suspect that he possessed abilities that fully matched those of a modern politician. He frequently visited the subdistrict and municipal government offices on village affairs. With a middle-school education and a Kuomintang membership, he had a political ideology, the Three People's Principles, to preach. He was conversant with current domestic and international politics. Motivated by modern nationalism and patriotism, he was among the leaders who had raised an armed force to fight the Japanese soldiers who had come into the village, and later he continued as a leader in the local guerilla band that harassed the Japanese occupation forces. His piercing eyes revealed a fierceness characteristic of many of the natives of this province.

Lee Feng's local position, his connection with government officials, his ideological function of providing a moral justification for the power structure of the formal government — all these brought him close to the model of the old gentry. Yet it would not be quite correct to call him a new gentry. Although an educational background was common to both cases, scholarship was no longer a restrictive qualification for the status and privileges that used to be the prerogative of the gentry in the old social order.

What had risen to take the place of the old gentry in the local political order was a group of local political bosses whose influence stemmed not merely from education but also from a variety of sources, including wealth, physical force, and political connections. Although the new group served the same function of the old gentry by acting as an intermediate link between the government and the local community, it was not an ideologically uniform group that could function as the local foundation of the national government.

Characteristics of the Local Political Order

When the operation of the power groups in the village is viewed in the over-all, it becomes clear that there was no systematic centralization of power in any single individual or group in the local power complex.

Theoretically, the clan had the power to control all groups and individuals within its kinship confine, but the powerful families and the Crop Protection Association, within limits, acted fairly independently of the theoretical central power of the clan and the inter-clan council. The crop protection group made its own decisions without going through the clan council. The rent collector of Family A would not hesitate at using duress, supported by that family's guns and influence, to force rent out of a recalcitrant tenant; and clan elders normally would not interfere in such acts. What might stay the hands of Family A would be the tenant's possible association with a powerful fraternity or an armed group which could retaliate.

The clan was, therefore, by no means all-powerful, and its control was being increasingly weakened by the rising status of the young, but it was still an accepted source of authority. It used its traditionally accepted authority to bring together two strong parties in conflict and to reconcile or arbitrate their differences; for whereas the power of individual groups was always regarded by the villagers as self-centered, the authority of the clan was still considered as representing the general interest of all the kinship members. Hence, powerful Family A had to rely frequently upon the moral position of the clan elders to smooth out its troubles with some of the villagers. In this sense, the clan organization provided a framework within which the power groups played their roles.

There was also a general concentration of power in the group of wealthier families. The power position of the large landlords' families was obvious; and although the membership of the Crop Protection Association contained a majority of the middle and poor peasants, its leadership was in the hands of a few well-to-do families. In fact, the Lion's Club, with its limited power, was probably the only group not led by wealthier elements. Nevertheless, although the wealthier families dominated the economy of the village and played a decisive part in the local power structure, they were divided into many centers of interest. Power accompanied their wealth, but that power base was not systematically organized.

In effect, then, the maintenance of peace and order in the village depended on a wholly informal balance of power among the local power groups; and no central political power could penetrate effectively into the village without either co-operating with the informal local structure, or controlling it, or replacing it with a new one. We never saw a policeman or an official in the village, except the tax collector. In 1949 there were some troops quartered in the ancestral halls in the village for a few weeks, but they had nothing to do with the local political structure. It is interesting to note that in another county in this province, when the Communist underground was becoming active in 1946, and when the system of collective responsibility was having no effect in combating them, the magistrate seized the elders from several affected villages and detained them until the names of the underground elements were handed over. Although the elders did not know who the underground elements were, others in the clan hastened to find out so as to get the elders out of detention. The kinship system succeeded where the system of collective responsibility had failed.

There appeared to be a general lack of interest in community welfare among most of the leaders in the Nanching groups, especially among those who had risen to their position through urban business adventures or through banditry and illegal traffic. Neither the head of powerful Family A nor the head of the Crop Protection Association seemed to have much interest beyond advancing their own wealth and position. The one group that still clearly identified its public position with community interest was the council of elders in the clan.

In terms of its place in the political-social order of the times as we have tried to describe it in this chapter, Nanching typified a stage in China's social development which must be briefly noted here.

As we have pointed out, village leadership had traditionally centered in the old gentry, a group deeply imbued with Confucian moral and social values which clearly defined the obligation of an educated man toward the state and the local community in return for the favored status gained.

The Confucian doctrine taught four stages of endeavor in the development of an educated man: first, try to perfect oneself; next, perfect one's own family; then, set one's kingdom in order; and finally, bring peace to the empire. In actual operation, this canon was binding only on the scholars and the gentry who constituted the extended arm of the national bureaucracy on account of their positions as community leaders and as candidates for officialdom. So the gentry were community-minded and national-minded, but the common people, especially the village peasants, were expected to observe only the first two steps of this canon, namely, to try to perfect themselves and their own families. If everyone in the community developed a sound moral character, observed his own status, lived a satisfying and contented life, died with proper burial from the kin, and thereby contributed to a peaceful and stable social order, he was considered a successful citizen and a desirable member of society. While the common man was encouraged to become educated and versed in affairs of the state, he was not expected to do so; nor did economic circumstances usually provide him with the opportunity to learn. The consequence was the development of a social order in which the scholars and the gentry constituted a national-minded minority, while the majority of the common people confined themselves largely to individual and family affairs without knowledge of the greater community and national interest and without any deep sense of moral obligation toward it.

Recent decades of social and political change had now disintegrated the old gentry as a functioning group and had elevated to power and prominence common men who did not have the educational and moral training to assume community leadership; and this situation could be plainly seen in Nanching. Although the modern educational system was producing a new group of community and national leaders whose civic knowledge was more in keeping with the requirements of the modern age than the tenets of Confucian doctrine, the recent decades of change had so widened the socio-economic gap between the urban centers and the countryside that the modern educated man almost always remained in the city and refused to return to the home village to supply it with community leadership. The few who returned were likely to be either men who were unsuccessful in the city or men with limited understanding of the modern political and social order.

Lee Feng, the only modern educated leader in the village, was typical. It has been mentioned how lavish were the prizes offered to winners in the local religious festival; and at the same time we were trying hard to locate funds for an adult education project for the village. The money that went into the prizes, not to mention the expense of hiring a theatrical troupe and building a temporary theater, certainly would have been more than needed for the project. We talked to Lee Feng about using some of the festival funds for modern adult education, but he was indifferent to the idea of curtailing traditional religious and recreational activities for a project that would help raise the peasants' ability to better their position and to meet the requirements of a new age. Lee Feng, the lone modern educated leader in the community, still lacked understanding of the social requirements of the modern age, an understanding that the old gentry had for the traditional social order.

Nanching was thus without adequate modern leadership. The community still operated in the traditional decentralized political pattern and remained largely unintegrated into the modern system of national central authority. It was poised between old and new, having lost the best of the old without having yet benefited from the dynamism of its new national setting. In this sense it represented a stage typical of the process through which every Chinese village had to go.

CHAPTER VIII

Class Stability and Mobility

SINCE ECONOMIC inequality between both individuals and groups was a chief characteristic of the social picture in Nanching, and the class system served to stabilize that inequality through institutionalized stratification of status, the class system was a fundamental aspect of the social order of the community. The leading criteria of class status in the village were power, education, kinship status in terms of age and generational levels, and wealth. Personal quality was a factor, but it assumed importance for the determination of class status only when it was demonstrated in the above terms. In Nanching, as elsewhere in China, the relative importance of each of these criteria had shifted considerably over the past half century.

The classical system of social stratification was a quadruple ranking of the population: the scholars, the farmers, the artisans, and the merchants. The scholars were ranked highest on the basis of their service to the people through knowledge, ethical virtue, and leadership in the affairs of the state; the farmers and the artisans occupied the next two ranks on account of their vital economic service to the people through honest labor. The merchants were placed at the bottom of society on the theory that they acquired their wealth unethically and so did not deserve the social and political importance it brought them. The system was thus founded on ethico-political grounds, with special reference to a political economy organized mainly by the scholar-bureaucracy and agricultural production.

In an agrarian community where there was no economic ground for the breeding of wealthy merchants, the classical class system seemed to have functioned effectively to the extent that it successfully maintained the scholar gentry in the upper-class position so that the latter could lead the community in conformity to the Confucian pattern of social and political order. It was in the cities where this system was persistently challenged by the wealthy merchant class, but even there, wealthy merchants would eventually join ranks with the scholars and officials by sending their sons to schools and into the examination halls, the portals to gentry status and officialdom.

After the 1920's, with the discontinuation of the imperial examinations and the discarding of Confucianism as the orthodoxy of the state, the Confucian value system gradually lost its hold, and the class status of Confucian scholars declined. There was a collapse of the ethico-political foundation of the classical system of social stratification, and the class system which rose in its wake was based largely on wealth or the social and political benefits which wealth brought. Education remained an important determinant of class status, but it was modern education and not Confucian learning that mattered; and only a family of wealth could give a son a middle-school or college education. Although under the kinship system age and generational seniority were still countervailing factors to wealth in the determination of class status, it now was the wealth of the individual and his immediate family and not the collective wealth of the wider kinship circle that determined the class status of an individual; and even power, if it was acquired through banditry and racketeering, could not give an individual high class status until it was combined with stabilized wealth in a morally acceptable form.

Such had been the story in Nanching. Wealth had become the basic determinant of class status in the village; and upper, middle, and lower classes corresponded closely to the division of the villagers into landlords and rich peasants, middle peasants and poor peasants. As noted in Chapter IV, of the 230 families in the village, 13.0 per cent were landlords and rich peasants, 30.5 per cent middle peasants, and 43.5 poor peasants, with 13.0 per cent belonging to nonagricultural occupations. There were thirty nonagricultural families, of which nine had the equivalent of middle peasant status, while the rest belonged to the poor peasant group in terms of wealth. On this basis, 13.0 per cent of the population belonged to the upper class, 34.4 per cent to the middle class, and 52.6 per cent to the lower class. (The percentage for the upper class, which was rather high due to the ready accessibility to urban opportunities, would probably not have been typical for interior agrarian communities.)

In traditional Chinese society there had always been a great distance between the upper and lower classes. The scholar gentry regarded the peasants as such an inferior breed of men that there was little friendly sociability between the two groups. Fei's presentation of class distance between the gentry and the peasants in a Kiangsu village [1] finds valid application here. Since in the recent decades, as wealth had become the chief demarcation for class status, the social distance between the rich and the poor had been as unbridgeable as that between the traditional gentry and the peasants, the question arises here as to the stability of the class system and its acceptance by the underprivileged.

In Nanching, as in the broad national setting, the privileged had always had to defend the status quo against attacks by the malcontent, and there had always been conflict between the superior and the inferior, the rich and the poor; but here such animosity took the form of individual friction rather than organized conflict between the classes. The head of Family A, for example, had earned general hatred from the poor in the village for his harsh collection of rents from recalcitrant tenants, but the rich family who had donated land to the school was the object of warm regard by the community, and there was no mass resentment against the rich in general. Above all, the superior or the rich elements as a class had not been consciously identified as the source of misery of the inferior and the poor.

According to the clan histories, for the past two centuries Nanching had escaped the peasant uprisings that occurred sporadically in Chinese history, including the great Taiping Rebellion which affected so much of China in the nineteenth century. Consequently, since such uprisings usually succeeded only in local redistribution of class status along the old pattern, and a reversion to the traditional system generally followed the quelling of the insurrection, the class system of the village had not been even indirectly affected by the peasant revolts which had occurred elsewhere in China. In Nanching, class distinction between individuals and groups was a well accepted fact of social life, and the class system had exhibited a high degree of stability.

One factor which contributed to stability was the highly integrative character of the kinship system, which helped to restrain and resolve conflicts between members of the same clan who had different class status. It would have been inconceivable to think of the clan as formally subdivided into the rich and the poor, each organized to carry on conflict with the other; aside from the value of clan solidarity, the intricate and comprehensive interdependence of social and economic interests within the clan membership precluded such a division. In fact the clan was proud of having rich or gentry members. Moreover, although factors of class status such as wealth, education, and power were based on broad social relations beyond the confines of the kinship structure, and thus they were theoretically not subject to kinship control, in a village like Nanching, where a large proportion of the village population belonged to a single clan, kinship relations tended to moderate the isolating effect of these factors.

A perhaps even more powerful and persuasive factor in village class stability was the traditional conservatism of the peasants, a characteristic trait which historically had always underlain the submissiveness of the poor peasants to an exploitative class system. The peasants' conservative outlook toward life was rooted in many aspects of the socio-economic order, including their lack of power and education, their highly restrictive agrarian economy which allowed little margin for risk with novel ideas, and their stress on family lineage as a foundation of life. It was rooted also, of course, in a long acceptance of Confucian orthodoxy as the basic doctrine of social order, a doctrine which gave prominent recognition to the inequality of men, imposed a regulated system of status as a means of institutionalizing such inequality, and taught that to advance peace, order, and happiness in the community, each member should observe his own status and be content with his lot. For the ambitious and capable, it encouraged advancement of status through proper channels, not through class struggle and conflict. Harmony in diversity was a central theme in the Confucian view of the social as well as the natural world.

A third fundamental reason for the popular acceptance and stability of the class system was that the social classes of this community did not have the rigidity of a caste system. Both the myth and the facts of class mobility operated in Nanching not only as they operated in any Chinese village but also in the somewhat special context of Nanching's proximity to a big city.

There were long historical beliefs, such as the old examinations as a reliable channel of class advancement open even to the poorest, the faith in thrift and industry as an assured formula of success that would elevate a person up the class scale. The traditional lore offered astounding examples of phenomenal success by men of humble origin, and such exploits of unusual men were classical lessons for the young in Nanching as in other parts of the country. As practical and concrete proof, there was the graduated scale of upper, middle, and lower classes and the further subdivisions which were like rungs on a ladder allowing step-by-step ascendance. If it seemed far-fetched to the poor to become rich, there was still realistic appeal in the possibility of first becoming a middle peasant, then a rich peasant, and finally a landlord – if not in one's own lifetime, then during the coming two or three generations. Thus the middle peasants as a class, accounting for about one-third of all families in the village, served as evidence of the improvability of one's class status; and the graduated class structure held forth hope for the poor and helped to induce faith in the system.

In reality, the extent of mobility differed with the individual class. As observed in this village, mobility had been high in the upper class, moderate in the middle class, and quite limited for the lower class, all in terms of proportion to the number of each class. The relatively mobile upper class seemed to suggest a high mobility of the entire system, but this was not the actual case. The upper class contained a rather small number of people, while the number at the base of the social pyramid was great. The elevation of a few families into the higher classes now and then gave a highly mobile character to the narrow top of the pyramid, but this produced only a small degree of mobility among the large number of people occupying lower-class status.

The mobile character of the upper class may be seen from the fact that, of the thirty-odd families occupying this status in Nanching, only one was an old family successfully maintaining its high class position for four generations, while the rest were families who had entered into this status within one to two generations. The one old family had developed business interests in the city and had sent sons into the gentry, and now lived mainly in the city, leaving only a few women in the large house in the village. Prominent among the newcomers was Family A, whose rise in one generation has been mentioned before. Wong Hung the merchant similarly rose to the upper class status in his own lifetime. Wong Yung started as a poor peasant and became a rich peasant during the war. The rest were mainly families of emigrants who had saved enough money from their urban occupations to buy land in the village within the past two generations.

The downward mobility of the upper class was considerable. We have mentioned one scholar-official family that traversed the whole cycle of rise and decline within three generations, bearing witness to the proverb, "no family retains wealth beyond three generations." The heaviest leveling hand in this situation was the absence of primogeniture and the likelihood of degeneration of the descendants of a wealthy man. The creator of a family fortune was usually a man who had won the struggle through frugality and self-discipline, and he would raise his children after his own image. Under the traditional kinship system, the children of a wealthy family remained in the same household under his authority, but the third generation would grow up in luxury and ease. When the grandfather died, the main integrating force of the family organization waned, and dissipation more than augmentation would characterize the course of development of the family. Increasing conflict over what was the rightful share of a member finally would bring about the break-up of the family into several independent units and the subdivision of the once sizable family property into small parcels. Considering the usually large size of a rich family, frequently brought about by polygamy in the form of concubinage, few family properties could yield sizable subdivided units at the end of the third generation.

If a wealthy family remained in the rural village, the general pressure from the kinship system might help in preserving its solidarity and delay the process of disintegration. Great upper-class families of three or four generations' standing were often found in many rural villages. But Nanching was too close to the city. As soon as a family acquired wealth, it moved to the city and remained beyond the effective influence of the village kinship system, in spite of the tenuous relationship still maintained with the clan and the village by leaving behind a few women and by occasional visits to the home soil. As a result, old upper-class families were few here.

Our knowledge about the upper-class families was fairly clear because there were not many of them, but information on the some eighty middle class families was limited. The general impression was that about thirty of these families had acquired middle-class status within two adult generations. The middle class theoretically drew its membership both from descending and ascending families, but in Nanching any families descending from upper-class status generally left the village for an urban livelihood, which was easier than tilling the soil. Consequently, the newcomers were recruited from the poor peasants who had scored moderate success either by emigrating to the cities or by efficient farming during the war. There was little information about the background of the status of the remaining fifty-odd middle-class families except that they were regarded as having been in that class position for more than two adult generations.

Our information on the mobility of the lower class was even scantier. We knew of several families that had descended from a middle-class position to the status of poor peasants. Many middle-class families of the Lee clan who had relied upon remittances from emigrants sank into poverty during the war because of the disruption of the urban economy. We did not know the approximate degree of upward mobility among the 120-odd families occupying the lower-class status at the time of our investigation, but our general impression was that the percentage of cases of ascendancy among the whole class appeared to be rather small. Those who had gone into the middle class and a few into the upper class originated from the lower class. Although we could approximate the number of such cases, since we did not know the size of the lower class at the time when such change of status occurred, we are not able to make any comparison.

One thing was fairly obvious. For the poor peasants, the road to improvement of their class status was long and hard. The exceedingly restrictive nature of a poor peasant's farm was almost an insurmountable obstacle. Working a small farm of less than two acres of mostly rented land with a negligible amount of capital, even the blessing of continuous good harvests for two or three years would give him and his family only a minimum of economic security, leaving him with little margin of savings.

The important normal step towards economic betterment for a poor peasant was ownership of his land, which was exceedingly difficult in a locality of high land value due to the rich soil, a long growing season, and proximity to the great city. At the time of our investigation, one mow of medium-grade irrigated land in Nanching was worth about 4,000 catties of unhusked rice, or the equivalent of about six years of average production of the land. This was about 20 per cent higher than the national average of land price estimated by the Chinese Land Administration Investigation Society.[2] It is difficult to imagine how a poor peasant who could hardly escape sinking into debt from year to year could accumulate 16,000 to 20,000 catties of unhusked rice to buy four or five mow of land fertile enough to maintain subsistence for an average family. At the wage level of 1948, it would have taken a landless farm laborer four years' pay to buy one mow of land, or sixteen to twenty years to buy himself a small farm of four to five mow of medium-grade irrigated land if he did not spend any part of his pay during all that period of time — hardly possible considering his personal needs and family obligations. Conditions here certainly bore out Fei's assertion that it took more than one generation of industry, frugality, and luck for a peasant to rise about poverty.

What Fei did not point out was that this situation applied largely to times of normal social and economic order but not to times of unusual conditions under which agricultural production became profitable enough so that the factor of paying rent to landlords failed to stop the financial growth of shrewd and industrious peasants. Such a situation occurred during the Japanese invasion and the inflation-cursed postwar years, when the disruption of transportation and market operations caused a steep rise in food prices in the urban areas which normally relied on supplies from great distances; and the effects of it were visible in Nanching, which profited, of course, from its proximity to the city. It was in this period that the Wongs, with a large proportion of tenant farmers among them, bought much land from the Lees, who had previously prided themselves as having many landowners, and the relative economic status of the two clans began to reverse. Many poor tenant farmers became financially secure, and a few even prospered into rich peasants. Wong Yung, for example, who was in his early forties in 1938 and had two teen-aged sons who helped him work a farm of nine mow (1.5 acres) of mostly rented land, took good advantage of the rising price of rice and fully utilized the labor of his young sons to expand his farm. By 1948 his was a large farm of about 70 mow (approximately 12 acres), of which he had come to own 30 mow.

The experience in Nanching adds weight to the hypothesis that class mobility in an agrarian economy was high at times of economic and political crises but very limited under stable circumstances. In this sense, historical periods of disturbances which had caused the downfall of many great families were fine hours for the hard-pressed poor. However, since Nanching had been until recently isolated from the outside world, the lifetimes of most of the individuals there had been spent in relatively peaceful and uneventful settings where the restrictive influence of the agrarian economy operated almost continuously; and the war experience was an exception.

The restrictive effect of the agrarian economy was not limited to farming alone but also applied to village commercial and handicraft undertakings. The grocery store and the carpentry and masonry shops were examples. Since their business operations were restricted to the confines of the local community, even a monopoly of all the business in the small area could not carry the owner far toward any sizable fortune; and all three concerns were exceedingly small, their owners relying on land for a supplementary income.

In general, then, there was available within the actual confines of Nanching local life one channel to wealth and prominence, namely, banditry, racketeering, or illegal traffic such as opium and gambling. But this channel was open only to a daring and lucky few, and only in times of disturbance when the revolutionary process had weakened the forces of government and law. For the majority of Nanching villagers any opportunity for class advancement lay outside of the agrarian community, that is, in emigration to the big city or to foreign lands. In fact, save for the head of Family A and a few other similarly doubtful characters, all the upper-class members in Nanching had made their modest fortunes outside of the village confines in the urban world, and even the majority of the less fortunate emigrants had helped improve the economic conditions of their families.

The situation in Nanching was in one sense a special one since there was close at hand the greater urban world which acted as a safety valve for the poor and the discontented in the village. But it also was a situation typical of the Chinese farm village everywhere since its people were traditionally conservative peasants. Thus, in spite of the village's accessibility to the big city and to the bigger yonder world, there were still 100-odd poor peasant families who had remained with their tiny plots of mostly rented land, reluctant to take a chance in the distant territories from whence came stories of misery as well as success, a contrast already too familiar to them in their home village. And thus, despite the increasing pace and degree of social change in the surrounding world, a process now nearly fifty years old, Nanching up to the very eve of the victory of Chinese Communism remained essentially fixed in its traditional stable social pattern.

PART II

Early Impact from the Communist Revolution

CHAPTER IX

Class Struggle as the First Step of Land Reform

THE FOREGOING chapters have pictured a village peasant community in which the basic factor was an agrarian economy that failed to provide minimum security for about one half of the village's population, the poor peasants, whose labor yielded such a small margin of savings that normal family events such as marriage, sickness, or death sank the family in debt, and calamities such as floods, droughts, and war put them at the brink of financial ruin and starvation. At the heart of the difficulty was the smallness of their farms and the crippling burden of paying rent, a condition which existed in varying degrees in other parts of China and which for over a century had been a brewing agent for periodic peasant riots and rebellions. It had motivated Sun Yat-sen's policy of giving "land to the tillers." It had given rise to the 25 per cent agricultural rent reduction program of the Nationalist-Communist coalition regime in the mid-1920's. It had provided the rationale for Mao Tse-tung's policy of making the peasant movement the heart of the Communist revolution. But until the Communists entered the scene, peasant riots and rebellions had been temporary episodes that had left the national institution of land ownership and farm organization unchanged.

When the victorious Communist revolution reached Canton in October 1949, Nanching was engulfed by the revolutionary forces that had so far spared it, and the village became one of roughly 1,000,000 rural villages in China marked for drastic revolutionary operations.

The first ten months under Communist rule were rather uneventful. Life went on in Nanching much as before save for occasional incidents when Communist soldiers forcibly bought vegetables, pigs, and chickens from the villagers at only about one-half the market price of the goods.

This was not new to the villagers; in fact, the Communist soldiers were somewhat better than previous civil war soldiers, who had frequently expropriated produce and livestock without any compensation. But the surface serenity did not allay the anxiety of those villagers who had heard of the policy of Communist land reform.

The Chinese Communist Party was explicitly pledged to land reform as the first step in its program to transform the social, economic, and political order of the entire nation. The official organ of the Chinese Communist Party, the *Jen-min Jih-pao* (*People's Daily*), declared:

> The general situation is this. Landlords and rich peasants, who account for less than 10 per cent of the rural population, own 70 to 80 per cent of all the land, while poor peasants, agricultural laborers and middle peasants, who account for about 90 per cent of the rural population, own only 20 to 30 per cent of the land . . . The peasants in various places have to pay to the landlord . . . the greater part of the yield from the land. Consequently, the peasants toil all year around without getting enough to eat, while the landlords live a parasitic life. This situation clearly indicates that the system of land ownership based on feudalistic exploitation is at the very root of our poverty, backwardness and foreign invasion and oppression of our country; it is the fundamental obstacle against our nation's democratization, industrialization, independence, unity, prosperity and being strong.[1]

Noting that "land reform in the past twenty years has mobilized the peasants to support actively the revolutionary wars and the revolutionary government," [2] and giving due credit to Sun Yat-sen for initiating the slogan of giving "land to the tillers," the Communists asserted that no correct line had been found to realize that slogan until the Communist Party came upon the scene under Mao's leadership.

Communist policy was promptly set forth in the "Law of Land Reform of the People's Republic of China" promulgated in 1950, and in the explanation of the basic points in this law by Liu Shao-ch'i's *A Report on the Problem of Land Reform* given before the National Committee of the People's Political Consultative Conference in June of the same year. These two basic documents set forth the fundamental objectives of "abolishing the system of land ownership based on feudalistic exploitation, and enacting the system of land ownership by the cultivators, so as to liberate rural production capacity, to develop agricultural production," and to create a vast market in the countryside to make possible the nation's industrialization.[3] Not so explicitly stated in these two documents was the intention to gain the peasants' support for the new Communist national political power by giving them land, a formula that had proven successful in the Communists' earlier struggle for power.

The basic measure in this policy was "to confiscate the land of the landlord class and to redistribute it to peasants having insufficient or no land," [4] a traditional revolutionary ideal; but it was to be carried out now by confiscating only the part of the rich peasants' land which was rented to other peasants, and that only under specified conditions, so as to make possible the "preservation of the rich peasants' economy" since it was considered beneficial to the development of the national economy at the early stage of transition toward socialism.[5] Another point of departure from previous revolutionary policies was the emphasis on orderliness in carrying out the liquidation of the class status of landlords, taking care "not to eliminate the physical existence of the landlords," the responsibility for the "historical crimes committed by the landlord class" being now laid on the old social system, and not on the individual landlords.[6] Consequently, official caution was given to land reform cadres to follow "legal procedures" in treating landlords and to avoid "indiscriminate beating and killing." The general strategy was to unite the poor peasants, agricultural laborers, and middle peasants and to neutralize the stand of the rich peasants so as to isolate the landlords.

The central land reform law was supplemented by special regulations of land reform for individual regions. Land reform in Nanching, for example, was governed by three sets of laws: the central law of land reform just mentioned, "Some Regulations by the Military and Political Commission of the Central-South Region on the Enactment of the Law of Land Reform," and the "Land Reform Regulations for Suburban Areas," all promulgated in 1950.

To continue, then, with the story of our village, within a week after the Communist troops occupied the territory, Nanching was ordered to surrender all firearms to the detachments of Communist officers and men who circulated in the area to collect them. The villagers handed over about a dozen old rusty rifles that belonged to the clans. The Communists were not satisfied and pressed for hidden arms, but private owners of arms did not yield, adopting a "wait and see" attitude. The Communists did not immediately pursue the question any further.

About June (or July) of 1950 Nanching was designated as part of a small area for a "pilot experiment" in the suburban territory of Canton. Land reform was to start here earlier than in the rest of the province so as to "absorb the necessary experiences" for application to the large-scale task of remaking the land system in the whole province. Land reform cadres appeared in the village with increasing frequency. They belonged to the subdistrict government of Pingan Chen and took orders from the Land Reform Commitee of the Canton municipal authorities, who in turn were under the Land Reform Committee of Kwangtung Province.

The land reform cadres in Nanching, three men and one woman in their late teens or early twenties, were high-school graduates and one seemed from the way he talked to have had one or two years of college. Their manners and conversation revealed an urban bourgeois background, which they carefully disguised under dirty gray uniforms and conscious attempts to imitate the peasants' mode of life, occasionally even living in the poor peasants' houses, eating their food, and helping with light farm chores in order to strike up a conversation with them for information about the village.

Their first task was to "set the masses in motion" in order to develop a situation of "class struggle," the basic step being to select "active elements" among the peasants to serve as a core for the organization of the peasants' association and the new "people's militia." Wong Ping, a middle peasant, was selected as an activist, to be the chairman of the peasants' association which was to serve as the center of the new village political power and to administer the land reform guided by the cadres. Lee Sheh-an was selected as another activist, to be the head of the new people's militia for the village.

These two were selected primarily because they had been active in village affairs. Wong Ping had once been business manager of the Wong clan, and he had acted for his old father as chairman of the village school board. He had spent considerable time in Hong Kong as a peddler, and his wife was from the urban laboring class. His wife said of him, "He is literate and never did much heavy physical labor. He can't compete favorably against others in the village in farming, which requires heavy physical exertion. I have told him time and again to find something else to do." Lee Sheh-an's father was a rich peasant and an emigrant, and Sheh-an had some years of middle-school education. But the father had died some years ago, and when the family land was divided between the boys, Sheh-an descended to the status of a middle peasant, with about eight mow of land. He rented out four mow, and farmed four mow, and he also rented seven mow from others. When he first returned to the village from school in Canton after his father's death, he had no established status in village affairs; but he was now considered an active young member who had taken part in village activities such as helping to manage the community opera and expressing opinions on public matters in group discussions held in the spacious yards of the ancestral halls during evening hours.

The selection of these two men to lead the vital new peasants' association primarily on the basis of their active part in village affairs appeared to deviate from the official Communist policy of using only elements from the poor peasants and agricultural laborers as the core of the new village leadership. Official directives repeatedly called upon the cadres to go first into a village to seek out activists from poor peasant and agricultural laborers and to get them to tell stories about conditions in the village and about their own sufferings. Poor peasants and agricultural laborers were to be coaxed to tell of their own financial plight and the harsh treatment or beatings they had received from the landlords and rich people in the village. They were to be encouraged to contrast the living conditions of the poor peasants like themselves with those of rich landowners and to see the "true root" of their own suffering by arguing the typical question of "who has supported whom?" Had the landlords supported the poor peasants by renting land to them, and the agricultural laborers by giving them jobs? Or had the tenants and agricultural laborers supported the landlords by the fruit of production from their own physical labor? Who had impoverished whom, and who had made whom rich? These were typical questions asked around the central issue of "who has supported whom?" as the initial means to arouse class enmity against the landlords and to generate a fighting spirit among the poor peasants and agricultural laborers.

After one individual was convinced of the cause and of the power of the Communist Party to support the cause, he was encouraged to contact other peasants and to have them tell similar stories of suffering in the light of the same arguments. When a sizable group of the poor peasants and agricultural laborers had come to see the "light," a militant group was considered to have been established, ready to serve as a core for the class struggle against the landlords.

This process of building the core of the peasants' association and the people's militia, as explained in the numerous land reform directives and pamphlets, was designed to achieve "purity of class composition" of the core so that it could carry out an uncompromising struggle against the landlords. To admit members from other classes into the core at this time was considered a danger which might dampen the militancy and confuse the ranks of the poor peasants and agricultural laborers. The middle peasants were allowed to join the peasants' association, but not normally to be made leaders at this stage of development. Anyone with firm connections with landlords, rich peasants, or members of the old ruling group in a village was, as a matter of official policy, to be excluded from sharing in or controlling the new leadership.

The selection of Wong Ping and Lee Sheh-an at the very outset by the land reform cadres was obviously not following the official line closely. The cadres simply came and inquired who were active in village affairs besides those formerly in control of village power, and in this way made contact with the two. The new leadership core was not a product of the process of *t'u k'u* (spitting out stories of bitterness) and *ch'uan lien* (getting others to do likewise). Rather, it was a product of the cadres' taking the least troublesome way of creating a few new leaders who were not a part of the existing formal village leadership.

This did not mean that the work of "spitting out bitterness" and "getting others to do likewise" was entirely forgotten in Nanching. The cadres did move a few peasants into pouring out their woes and their hatred for the rich and the powerful in the village. One old peasant, for example, told the story of how he had mortgaged his six mow of good land to the head of Family A when he had gone to work as a coolie on a dock in Hong Kong when he was young. He remained a poor laborer in that British colony, and in 1942, after the Japanese occupied Hong Kong and turned it into a city haunted by mass starvation, he returned to the village, wanting to redeem his land with the meager savings he had accumulated from the long hard years. But Family A refused to give up the land, and he was forced to become a poor tenant farmer. After the cadres' explanation of "feudalistic exploitation" and the liberating mission of the Communist Party, he became very bitter against landlords as a class. However, the number of poor peasants in Nanching involved in such "woe pouring" was not large.

With leadership of the cadres established among the aroused portion of the poor peasants, the stage was set for the first act in the long drama of land reform, namely, the demand for refunds of rent deposits and the excessive portions of rent. In accordance with land reform laws and regulations, before the redistribution of land, rent on agricultural land was to be reduced by 25 per cent, retroactive to the year of "liberation," which was 1949 in this territory. Rent deposit, where charged, was also to be refunded to the tenant, and charging rent deposit was prohibited by the new law. In demanding refunds of the reduced portion of the rent, tenants were not allowed by the law to go back beyond the year of "liberation" or to charge the landlord interest on the reduced portion of the rent owed to the tenant.

One September night in 1950 a group of about twenty noisy, angry peasants appeared at the door of Lee Sheh-an's house, demanding refund of the reduced portion of the rent. Lee, although already appointed by the cadres as the head of the new people's militia, became frightened. He looked out into the darkness and saw one man who was the tenant renting his four mow of land, but he did not recognize the others, who might have been from neighboring villages, and his own tenant did not speak up. It was a stranger's voice that said that Lee owed his tenant 1,000 catties of unhusked rice in reduced rent and demanded that this be paid immediately. Lee tried to argue with them, but everyone in the crowd began shouting angry, indistinct words. Several peasants pushed Lee aside, and the whole crowd rushed into the house. They searched the storage room and cleaned out every kernel of unhusked rice stored there – about 1,600 catties altogether – and carried the loot off into the darkness.

There was another similar occurrence in the village during this period, but most of the refunding of rent and rent deposits was settled peacefully. The tenant named the figure; the landlord haggled with him. With a certain amount of mediation from newly elevated men like Wong Ping, a compromise sum was agreed upon, and the issue was considered resolved. One reason for the relative peacefulness was that the large landlords had by this time fled not merely from the village but also from Communist rule by going to Hong Kong. The entire Family A, for example, had gone to Hong Kong, and the concubine of Wong Hung had also taken her two children and the servant to her Hong Kong home. Toward the end of 1950 there was no one on hand to collect rent from the land for these large landlords, and the tenants found that they were farming the land free of charge. Another reason was the large number of small owners in the village whose relationship with the tenants had been generally friendly.

The reduction of rent and the refund of reduced rent and rent deposit were the initial material enticements for further development of the class struggle aimed at the eventual liquidation of the class status of landlords. The official policy intended that the tenants should use the refunded grain for improvement of production on their farms. When refunded grain was handed over by the landlords, it was to be received by the peasants' association for distribution on the basis of need to the poor peasants, including the tenants themselves. In Nanching the grain was not handed over to the peasants' association but was usually received by and divided among the group which had accompanied the tenant to the landlord's house to present the demand. Many individual tenants settled the matter of refund individually with the landlords and kept the entire refund to themselves.

According to the official Communist line, the organization of the peasants' association as the new center of village power, the mobilization of the peasants for class struggle, and the initial step of demanding refunds of rent and rent deposits faced one serious obstacle – the armed force of the landlord class and of the "local bullies" who were allied with the landlords if they were not landlords themselves. Official Communist literature produced no clear definition of a local bully, but in general it identified him as the head of an armed gang that terrorized a village or a group of villagers by armed extortion; more often than not, he was connected with the underworld or banditry, although he himself did not usually engage in open, lawless acts; he was a "swashbuckler in his native village"; he frequently beat or even killed people who were in his way or who refused to be fleeced; he was often engaged in the gambling and opium traffic with armed protection and acted in league with corrupt local officials. In Communist parlance, the bullies often "owed the people a debt of blood."

It was therefore Communist instruction that it was necessary to eliminate such elements as the local bullies before the peasants could feel free to take an active part in the development of class struggle against the landlord class; and, as part of the process of land reform, there was normally an "anti – local-bully" campaign which sometimes preceded the reduction and refund of rent and rent deposits, and sometimes took place concurrently with the latter. The standard technique was to arrest the local bully and put him on public trial in a "people's court," which often pronounced a death sentence on the victim, thus eliminating the head of the gang and terrorizing the lesser bullies into dissolution and submission. Such mass trials were among the most dramatic and violent mob scenes in the process of land reform. It is disputable whether there was in Nanching any character who would fit completely into the above description of a local bully, save possibly the head of Family A, who had already fled the scene.

While no mass public trial was staged for anyone in the village, this did not mean that mild cases of local bullying did not exist in the Communist view. One example was Lee Feng. About two months after Communist occupation of the village, a small detachment of soldiers of the local garrison knocked at Lee Feng's door in the middle of the night. He was so terrified that he was rather slow in opening the door.

The soldiers were angry, accusing him of taking time to hide arms and illegal documents. They made a thorough search of the house but found no illegal objects. However, they pointed to some fine things, such as a pair of porcelain vases and a set of silver-plated spoons, and said that Lee Feng was a robber since, as these fine things did not match a peasant's home, he must have obtained them illegally. Despite his arguments, and amidst the wailing of his wife and children, the soldiers tied him up and dragged him off. He was repeatedly beaten while being pushed along the village street. He was taken first to Pingan Chen and then to a prison in Canton. He was not permitted visitors. The villagers said that the police wanted to know in detail his connections with local Nationalist political circles. He was required to surrender a revolver which the police said he was seen wearing during the community opera in the summer of 1949, before the Communists came. He said that he had borrowed the revolver, and that he did not possess any firearms. He stuck to this story in spite of torture. Finally, he was accused of being a local bully and was sentenced to three months of "labor education." When released, he had yellow jaundice, his face was swollen, he appeared subdued in spirit, and he became a so-called "controlled element," with his activities and movements under strict surveillance by the peasants' association and by the Communist police force in nearby Pingan Chen. Whereas formerly he had been very popular and had many friends, now few people dared to talk to him or enter his home for social visits. He was isolated in public life, and his past political influence became a curse upon him.

The head of the Crop Protection Association, Wong Hua-ying, was another case in point. Since he was the man who had collected clan rifles in the village and handed them over to the Communist soldiers, he was viewed favorably as a collaborator with the new regime. Later, some cadres visited him in his house and saw a photograph on the wall showing a group of peasants, each holding a rifle or a sidearm. Questioned about it, he explained that the group was a "navigation protection corps" that he had once belonged to but which was no longer in existence. The cadres asked lengthy questions about the location of the men and the arms and particularly about his own rifle, shown in the picture. He pleaded ignorance about the other members of the corps and said that he had sold his own rifle some time ago. The cadres were dissatisfied. Wong Hua-ying, sensing danger, escaped from the village immediately and went into hiding, in Hong Kong, according to the villagers. That night a group of soldiers searched the house, but found nothing incriminating. They arrested his wife and her two children.

The oldest child, about six years old, was sent to a relative, and the mother took her few-months-old infant with her to prison. We learned that severe physical torture was repeatedly applied to force her to divulge where her husband was and where the firearms were hidden. Wong Hua-ying sent word back to the village that he would be willing to return to the village to stand trial if his wife and baby were released. The Communist police refused the request, applying further physical torture to the wife. Finally, she admitted that the arms were buried under the front yard of the house. The soldiers went to dig for them and found over ten pieces of firearms, including one machine gun. After several months, the wife and baby were released, but Wong Hua-ying never returned.

According to the Communist timetable, with the landlord class and their associated groups disarmed, and with the local bullies deposed from power, thus removing the physical threat against changing the economic system, the process of land reform advanced to another stage, namely the identification of land ownership and class status of the individuals in the village.

The identification of land ownership was a necessary step because of two traditional situations. One was the custom of using a "hall name" as the owner of land, and the other the fact that a person's land was frequently registered in more than one hall name, thus giving the impression of more than single ownership. This was done for many reasons, one of them being the prevention of possible foreclosure of the entire family property by creditors should the landowner contract a loan and become unable to repay it. The result was that government records of legal registration of land deeds did not reveal the total land possession of a person or a family, particularly those with extensive possessions. A third situation arose after the Communist take-over. To avoid identification as a landlord, there was a scramble among the larger landlords to hide the ownership of their land by various means, such as having a friendly poor peasant, usually a relative, take temporary ownership of a part of the land. Uncertain as to the purpose and durability of the new Communist regime, many poor peasants did this for the landlords, particularly if the parties involved were cemented by long friendship or family relations. Family A, for example, decentralized part of its land to several tenants who were kinsmen in the same clan.

When the cadres were ready to draw the demarcation of class status among the villagers, it became necessary for them to identify the real owners of the land. They used a number of poor peasants in the village as informers, to identify hall names with individuals and families. Since we were not able to see the Communist official record on this matter, it is hard to say to what extent they succeeded. From what we were able to learn, it seemed they successfully identified most of the hall names that belonged to the leading families; but later Communist press information indicated that a large number of cases of disguised temporary ownership remained hidden through 1952, leading to the re-examination of the real ownership of land in 1953.

With the ownership of land identified by about January of 1951, to whatever degree of accuracy, the stage was set for the identification of the class status of every family and the delineation of class lines among the villagers. The identification of class status was done by applying the land reform regulations governing this point to each family. Technically, each individual should be assigned his own class status, but the economic unity of the family made the family the actual unit of class status which all the members shared except when some individual member had followed another occupation and thus acquired a different economic status.

For a rural village, the essential classes established in the official regulations were landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants, agricultural laborers, and vagrants. While details of the definition for each of these classes can be examined in the "Decisions on the Identification of Rural Class Status" by the Administrative Council of the Central People's Government, promulgated in August 1950, it would be useful here to point out a few characteristics.

The major criteria in the determination of class status were the amount of land owned and the degree to which the land had been used as a means of "exploiting others." In addition, the standard of living was considered together with these two factors. A family dependent entirely upon renting out land for a living but having about the same standard of living as the majority of the villagers because of the large number of members in the family and because of the shortage of labor in the family were considered as small land rentiers and not as landlords. If a peasant farmed a part of his own land with the help of some hired day labor, rented out part of it, and loaned money for interest, and the total amount of "exploitation" by hired labor, renting out land, and lending money to others did not exceed 15 per cent of the total income of the family, he was considered not a rich peasant but a well-to-do middle peasant even though his standard of living might be well above that of the average family in the village.

These examples serve to illustrate the range of possible disputes over the definition of class status of a family in accordance with the official line. Since in a highly diffused situation such as the farm economy of a family it was frequently difficult to determine even the accurate amount of total income a family received in a year, the percentage of this income which represented the proceeds from exploitation was a highly controversial matter. The relative difference in the standard of living between a well-to-do middle-peasant family and a rich-peasant family or even a poor landlord's family was not always clearly marked, and the placement of a family in any one of these three categories would make a great deal of difference in the economic, political, and social treatment the family received under the new order. Frequently it meant the difference between security and bankruptcy, at times between life and death.

Deliberation on these difficult problems and the decision on the class status of each family were legally the duty of the peasants' association, on the theory that people in a village knew one another's status best. But here in Nanching the cadres from Pingan Chen did most of the deliberating and making of decisions, with several persons from the peasants' association advising them. The young cadres examined the book containing the record of each family's land ownership, asked the persons from the peasants' association for an estimate of "exploitation" income relative to the family's total income, the possible amount of surplus grain or income the family had in a year, and the general standard of living it enjoyed in comparison with that of an average family. A tentative class status was then determined for each family in the village.

By the end of January 1951 the walls of the ancestral hall of a subdivision of the Wong clan were plastered with over 200 slips of oblong red paper; on each was written the name of the head of a family and the amount of land it had, and they were grouped into landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants, and farm laborers. They were posted so that the villagers could come to look at them and protest cases of injustice in the identification of class status. Fourteen were listed as landlords, about four or five as rich peasants, a large number as middle peasants, an even larger group as poor peasants, and a comparatively small group as agricultural laborers. Wong Ping, the head of the peasants' association, was listed as a middle peasant, although some peasants thought he should belong to the class of rich peasants. Lee Feng was listed as a rich peasant. One Wong Wu Shih, a widow with twenty mow of land (about 3.3 acres), was listed as a landlord.

Her son had died some years ago, and since she could not farm the land, she had rented out all of it. This put her into the category of those who lived entirely by exploitation. A senior officer from the Ministry of Agriculture in Peking came to visit the village. Looking at the paper slips bearing the class status of the villagers, he thought that this woman with only twenty mow of land and no ability to farm it should be listed as a small land rentier and not as a landlord. However, he expressed a desire not to interfere with the work of the junior cadres in the village. The woman presented vigorous verbal protests to the peasants' association, but to no avail, and she was kept in the same class with Family A and other large landowners.

There were quite a few cases of change from middle- to poor-peasant status as a consequence of individual protest in the general effort to get oneself listed in as low a class status as possible. Whatever the manner in which the status of each family was decided upon, the villagers were now fully differentiated into distinctly marked classes.

The general proportion of the classes corresponded roughly to what we had learned about the class composition of the village previous to the Communist rule.* A great anxiety and tenseness pervaded the village, for now every family was assigned a status fraught with social, economic, and political consequences. Those families listed as landlords waited for the axe to fall. Those listed as rich peasants were extremely

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* This picture might be compared with the pre-land reform distribution of economic status among the villagers. It would be useful to compare Nanching's distribution of class status with the combined figures of several villages that comprised another locality, Kuan Chia Tsui in Ch'i-yang county of Hunan Province, a major rice-producing area about 200 miles north of Nanching. There was a general similarity between the two communities. Nanching's larger proportion of landlords and rich peasants and nonagricultural elements was due to its considerable number of emigrants who worked in the cities, whereas Kuan Chia Tsui was an inland community rather inaccessible to urban occupational opportunities. The distribution of economic status in Nanching and Kuan Chia Tsui in 1950, prior to land reform, was as follows:

	Number of Households		Per cent	
	Kuan Chia Tsui	Nanching	Kuan Chia Tsui	Nanching
Landlords and rich peasants	84	30	5.3	13.0
Middle peasants (including small rentiers)	482	70	30.4	30.5
Poor peasants and farm laborers	931	100	59.0	43.5
Nonagricultural and others	84	30	5.3	13.0
Total	1,581	230	100.0	100.0

(*Sources*: Figures for Kuan Chia Tsui, *Ch'angchiang jih-pao*, Hankow, February, 1952, p. 2; figures for Nanching, see above, Chapter IV.)

uneasy, for they knew their fate was undecided, in spite of the temporary policy of "preservation of the rich peasants' economy." They felt lucky, for the time being, for they saw rich peasants in other villages being listed as landlords because of having rented out some of their land. The middle peasants experienced considerable suspense. Whatever amount of land they owned and the degree of economic security they had built up, they considered it the result of their own hard labor, and they clung to it desperately, for they did not know of any other workable and reliable system which would protect them and their families from hunger. Now that land could be taken away wholesale by order and force, they were uncertain how long their land and property could be preserved. Furthermore, many of the relatively well-to-do were in juxtaposition to the rich peasants, and they did not know whether they would some day be "promoted" to that rank.

Here in Nanching, while all these feelings troubled the middle peasants, they probably fared better than those in other places, for several were in important positions in the peasants' association where they had a voice in the making of policies for the village. In many other villages where the peasants' associations were controlled by the poor peasants and farm laborers, the position of middle peasants was more insecure. Poor peasants and agricultural laborers were generally the more satisfied ones, since their lot could not be worse under any circumstances; a share of free land was a boon regardless of the degree of uncertainty of the future. But when Lee Ch'un, a poor peasant, and Wong Ping, both important figures in the peasants' association, talked about the forthcoming redistribution of land and how much each qualified person would get, we observed little natural expression of enthusiasm on their faces.

The Communist official strategy in this process was to "neutralize the rich peasants, unite the middle peasants with the poor peasants and agricultural laborers, and attack the landlords." Facts in Nanching suggest that this policy was only partly successful because of the uneasy feeling among the rich peasants and a large number of the middle peasants. But it was successful in generating hatred against large landlords.

Now that the landlord class was definitely identified, however the composition of this class might have been determined, the next act was to force the landlords to surrender all surplus grain, leaving them enough for subsistence until the harvest of the next crop and enough for investment in the next crop. This procedure was designed to obtain production capital from the landlords for the poor peasants and to make sure that the landlords were shorn of their economic power. As it actually worked out in Nanching, and in many other villages in this locality, few rational criteria were used in determining the amount of surplus grain to be surrendered by the landlords. An arbitrary amount was named by the cadres in conjunction with the members of the peasants' association for each landlord according to his estimated ability to pay.

One absentee landlord who owned about sixty mow of land was assigned a figure of 40,000 catties of unhusked rice to be surrendered as surplus grain. The family had moved to the city and on to Hong Kong after 1950, its house in the village having been occupied by relatives for many years; and there was no grain belonging to that family for confiscation. As a result, their residential house in the city was sealed by the government and sold, and the proceeds went to the peasants' association as surrendered "surplus grain." Family A escaped all this by having sold their property in the city and moved to Hong Kong. The woman Wong Wu Shih, who owned twenty mow, was assigned 10,000 catties of unhusked rice as "surplus grain" to be surrendered. This was beyond her ability to pay as she had less than 1,000 catties of grain in storage and only small cash savings. It was Wong Ping and several others who finally had the levy reduced to 3,000 catties, which she paid by borrowing from relatives in the city.

Nanching probably suffered less violence in the class struggle than many other villages. Nevertheless, in about one and a half years the Communist mass campaign to arouse hatred among the poor against the rich broke down the stability of an ancient social order which had kept the conflict of class interests under control. Although formerly there had been suppressed hatred between the two extremities, such as between Family A and its tenants, there had been generally peaceful co-existence among the large middle section and between the middle groups and the two extremes; but now, under the organized campaign of class struggle, the entire village population was methodically partitioned into class compartments, each set against the other.

CHAPTER X

Confiscation and Redistribution of Land

ANTICIPATING A crisis, a landlord and his family had moved out of the village in 1950. We rented his vacated house for our investigators to live in while we were collecting data. In February of 1951 one of our field workers was told by the land reform cadres to move his belongings out of the house or the belongings would be regarded as part of the property of the landlord and taken out for redistribution. We knew then that the final step of land reform, the confiscation of landlords' land and property for redistribution, was at hand. According to the Communist official policy, after identification of class status of the villagers and surrender of surplus grain by the landlords, the situation was ripe for the confiscation of landlords' land and property and subsequent redistribution to peasants who had "insufficient or no land." Like other steps in land reform, this step was governed by both central and local regulations which set forth the principles on what land and property to confiscate, who was eligible for a share of them, and how they should be divided.

Land to be confiscated for redistribution included both that owned by public organizations and that owned by individuals under certain conditions. In Nanching all land owned by organizations was subject to confiscation, and the procedure was carried out without any obvious deviation from official policy, resulting in the seizure of the following:

School land	20 mow
Clan land (Wong)	30 mow
Clan land (Lee, subdivision land)	20 mow
Temple land	10 mow
Total	80 mow

Official regulations permitted the retaining of school land for educational purposes; but Nanching school land was confiscated along with other public land on the theory that much of the income from it had in the past been manipulated by powerful families, an ill-founded accusation. The official purpose, of course, was to reduce local autonomy over education and put the school under central government control. Official regulations for the Central-South region also permitted the retaining of a certain amount of clan land for defraying the cost of ancestral sacrifice should this be desired by the peasants, and there was some talk of retaining one or two mow of the Wong clan land for this purpose, a measure which Wong Ping, head of the peasants' association, supported; but the cadres maintained that those who wanted the "superstitious" ancestral sacrifice continued could get together and pay for it. The ten mow of temple land was confiscated on the ground that the priest should live by labor and not by exploitation of others through superstition, but three mow of land was returned to the priest for sustenance.

A total of about 460 mow of private land was confiscated for redistribution. A part of this land belonged to families classified as landlords, and a part belonged to lesser landowners who rented out land amounting to twice the norm owned by the average peasant family in this village. What constituted the norm, the amount of land owned by the average peasant family, was a subject of considerable controversy. The percentage of rented land was high in Nanching, and even the middle peasants owned only two or three mow of land. If this amount was considered as the average, a large number of small landowners who rented out land would see part of their land reduced. The norm was, therefore, arbitrarily established as six mow, and any amount of land rented out in excess of twelve mow was declared subject to confiscation provided the standard of living of the family was well above the average in the village. This provision also constituted a disputed issue. The official principle of sparing the rich peasants was generally observed in Nanching, provided the rich peasant performed "main labor" on his farm aside from hiring labor to work for him; but Lee Feng had part of his land confiscated on the ground that he did not perform enough "main labor" on his land. Thus, aside from the fourteen landlords whose land was completely confiscated, a sizable number of smaller landowners who rented out land were also affected by the program. In the latter category were a number of emigrants who had invested their urban earnings in land.

The 460 mow of private land and 80 mow of public land confiscated yielded a total of 540 mow for redistribution. Official regulations prescribed that the confiscated land of several villages, which constituted a *hsiang* or administrative village, should be pooled together for redistribution in order to equalize the situation between villages having a surplus of land and those short of it in the general effort to give each poor peasant enough land for subsistence. In a neighboring *hsiang,* where two villages owned very little land and the villagers mainly farmed the next village's land, this pooling policy was followed. But Nanching, fairly self-sufficient in land, was treated as a self-contained unit where only resident villagers could obtain a share of the confiscated land in the village.

The first question in the redistribution of confiscated land was who qualified to receive a share of it. The official principle prescribed redistribution to peasants with "insufficient or no land"; and, although it was easy to identify those without land, it was not so obvious whether a landless person was earning enough to live on from nonagricultural occupations, such as handicrafts and small businesses, and therefore deserved no share. Even more difficult was the definition of those having "insufficient land," for this involved the dual problem of the amount of land a family owned and the number of mouths it had to feed; but this problem was met by establishing a per capita norm. Figuring on a per capita norm of slightly less than one mow, coupled with the consideration of the number of persons in a household, about 130 families were to receive land. A number of controversies and protests arose against this selection made by the land reform cadres and the officers of the peasants' association. The Lees were dissatisfied because more Wongs than Lees were included in the list, and the traditional hostility between the two clans was aroused; but the cadres threatened punishment to anyone who led or plotted factional fights between the peasants on the basis of traditional clannish feelings. Since villagers by this time had learned to appreciate the violent character of the new power, the controversies and protests rested on an individual basis and did not develop into organized conflict.

Among the some 130 families, we recognized many categories of people. Outstanding in number were the 100-odd poor-peasant families who generally farmed less than six mow of land of which they owned only a small fraction. They included peddlers whose livelihood depended on selling herbs and miscellaneous items in the city, dispossessed landlords who received back their share of confiscated land on the same basis as other peasants qualified to receive land, those few emigrants who had recently returned to the village because of unemployment in the city after the Communists' take-over, and the village seeress who was no longer allowed to practice her superstitious art. One class of people whose demands for land were denied were the migratory farm laborers, the "boat people" who lived on floating homes and worked up and down the Pearl River. Since some of them had worked in Nanching regularly every year at planting and harvesting seasons, they sent several representatives to the village to talk to the cadres about sharing in the confiscated land; but the villagers raised stiff opposition on the ground that land was already short in the village, and the boat people were not established members of the village.

The formula for redistribution of land was to take the confiscated land plus all the land owned by those who were to receive land and thereby arrive at a total of land which was then divided by the number of *all* persons in every family eligible to receive land. The quotient constituted the share of land to be redistributed on a per capita basis. In Nanching the 540 mow of land confiscated from collective and private owners plus approximately 80 mow owned by families eligible to receive land made a total of 620 mow (slightly less than 100 acres) for about 650 people, a per capita share of slightly less than one mow. A family whose land amounted to less than this per capita received enough land to bring it up to this figure. For instance, Wong Mi had one mow of land and three persons (father, mother, and himself) in his family. In accordance with the formula, he received two mow of land, giving his family a total possession of three mow. A returned emigrant with two mow of land and a family of five (wife, three young children, and himself) received three mow, making a total family possession of five mow.

In the apportioning of land, the official principle was to equate the quality so that every family would get a farm of approximately equal fertility. A family owning fertile land would be given a lower grade of land, and a family already in possession of poor land would be given better plots. In the process of redistribution, the official emphasis was upon preserving the integrity of the original farm as far as possible, even to the extent of giving the original farmer somewhat more land than the average if this should be necessary to preserve the integrity of the original farm. Thus, a family of five farming six mow of land, all rented from others, would receive all of the six mow if they were marked out for confiscation and redistribution, even though this would be one mow in excess of the quota.

In Nanching the policy of balancing the quality of land was carried out through bargaining between the individual recipient and the peasants' association officials, who were thoroughly acquainted with the land quality in various parts of the village. Although apparently at least an attempt to be fair was made in the majority of cases, there was grumbling that several officers of the peasants' association received the best land and the land nearest the village site. Wong Tan, a poor peasant generally known as an unscrupulous character, who was a committee member of the peasants' association, was accused of having obtained four mow of all good irrigated land at the very edge of the village site.

In suburban areas such as Nanching all confiscated land was nationalized, being redistributed to peasants for their use but not for their ownership. Each family was issued a certificate containing the names and ages of all family members and stipulating their right to use the land distributed to them, but the land could not be sold. Although there was no stipulation concerning the inheritance of the right to use the land, the whole procedure created an uneasy feeling among the peasants in the village, even among those who were given a share of the confiscated land. They said that they were quite puzzled as to whether to call the land their own and as to how long it would remain in their hands.

In addition to land, landlords' properties subject to confiscation in accordance with official policy included surplus grain, houses, farm tools and implements, and draft animals. In the process of redistribution the landlord's family was given back a house to live in and a share of farm tools on the same basis as other recipients. In Nanching about twenty houses were confiscated for redistribution, some 10 per cent of all the houses in the village. Since all the large landlords who owned more than one house in the village had already escaped, all of their houses were confiscated and redistributed with no question of reserving a house for their own use. Small landlords generally had only one house in which they lived, and these houses were not touched.

The furniture of both large and small landlords was subject to confiscation and redistribution, and we saw all the furniture moved out of the house of one small landowner and displayed on the street. The articles included such things as old benches and wooden chairs, three tables, large earthen jugs for holding rice and water, pots, pans, some old chinaware, chopsticks, a couple of old mosquito nets, and several worn-out cotton quilts. A woman standing behind this pile was crying. A group of peasants gathered around to look over the articles. We did not see the actual process of redistribution of these things.

There were not many farm tools for redistribution, since most of the large landlords did not operate their own farms but rented out their land and therefore had not invested much in farm tools. Expensive tools and implements, like winnowers and water pumps, which poor peasants lacked were uncommon among confiscated articles. One item of considerable importance was the water buffalo, the only draft animal used for farming in the Nanching area. Several buffaloes owned by landlords for renting out were confiscated for redistribution. Since none of the 130-odd eligible families possessed any water buffaloes and since there were so few of them to go around, it was decided that several families should receive and care for one buffalo collectively — a co-operative arrangement of caring for and feeding the animal which did not work out well, and a few of the buffaloes died as a consequence.

Personal belongings like gold and silver jewelry and ornaments of landlords and their families did not appear in the process of confiscation. Presumably, many of these were squeezed out in the process of surrendering surplus grain and the rest were well hidden.

Confiscation of landlords' belongings was designed to give poor peasants the means of production and to alleviate their economic difficulties. The one category of landlords' property that the law exempted from confiscation was poultry and other animals, such as pigs; but in Nanching, as a result of mob action, all these were taken away for redistribution by selling them and dividing up the money.

The over-all policy of land reform was to "leave the middle alone while equalizing the two extremities." By equalizing the wealth between the rich and poor, it was expected that everyone in the agrarian community would possess an economic status of the middle peasants. As it worked out in Nanching, land reform appeared to have given the majority the economic status of lower-middle or upper-lower class, a situation representing a certain improvement for the poor peasants over their pre-Communist economic conditions.

In historical perspective, from the Hsin Dynasty (9–23 A.D.) on, redistribution of land had been repeatedly attempted as a solution to political and economic crises caused partly by concentration of land ownership in the hands of a minority group; but the equalized situation had never endured for long, as the forces making for concentration of land ownership soon reasserted themselves. Thus the Communist land reform, despite its Marxist twist, was not historically unique in its essential features. What we saw with vivid detail in Nanching might be regarded as a re-enactment of a historical scene in an agrarian economy which had in the past been governed by cycles of concentration and dispersion of land ownership. What made the Communist policy different from its historical precedents was its treatment of equalization of land ownership as a transitional step toward reorganization of the agrarian economy on a collectivized basis. Such economic transformation, if successful, might theoretically end the recurrence of the cycle of dispersion and concentration of land ownership as a source of agrarian crises besides contributing to the construction of an industrialized socialist state.

CHAPTER XI

Post–Land-Reform Village Economy

Now that the village of Nanching had been put through the convulsive process of land reform, what was the state of its economy in 1951? Were the peasants getting a larger income than before? While known facts about the village may provide an estimate, it should be kept in mind that we are trying to assess a temporary transitional situation. The reorganization of the individual farms into larger organized units was soon to begin, and land reform was but one stage in the general process of reorganization toward collectivistic agriculture. Nevertheless, an evaluation of the transitional economy after land reform and before collectivization will contribute toward an understanding of the process of transformation of the economic life in this village.

Productivity of the Soil

A primary question in assessing the village's post–land-reform economy is whether there was any increase of yield from the soil. An examination of the major factors affecting agricultural productivity warrants no positive answer to this question.

Up till 1951 no general technical improvements were visible in this territory. The campaign to adopt improved strains of rice was just starting in that year, and there were isolated instances of trial adoption in some villages in this area, but Nanching was not among them. Irrigational and water-control projects, which could raise agricultural production substantially, had not begun as a general movement in this area at this time. The repair and maintenance of a nearby dike served to keep up Nanching's production but not to increase it. In spite of the strenuous campaign to urge the peasants to collect more fertilizer, we saw in Nanching no sign of increased use of fertilizer applied to the land. Both capital and credit were extremely short in the village after land reform, and there seemed little likelihood of increased investment in fertilizer or other phases of agricultural production. The labor exertion campaign could have stimulated productive efforts among some lower-middle and poor peasants who had received free land from the land reform, but the limitation of capital investment prevented any rise of productivity of their farms above those of the middle peasants.

On the other hand, there were many situations obviously unfavorable to any increase in productivity. There was admittedly low morale among the rich peasants and a large number of middle peasants, thus reducing the productivity of the groups who had been the most efficient producers in the past, partly owing to their greater capital investment. A Communist leader who had conducted land reform in the North and now was sent to this area admitted that the first one or two years following land reform generally saw a drop in morale and productivity among most peasants, and that what was happening in Nanching was better than in a number of other places he had seen, the decline in production here not being generally noticeable. The feeling of uncertainty about the future of their property and interests haunted the rich and middle peasants and discouraged them from investing maximum capital and labor on their farms. (In many villages in this province, where the land reform process had been more violent and treatment of the richer peasants rougher than in Nanching, many peasants refused to raise more crops than absolutely needed for their own subsistence.)[1]

Therefore, in estimating productivity from the soil, we assume there was no change in this period and use the old norm of annual yield per mow as the standard. This means 700 catties of unhusked rice per mow of rice crop, and 1,400 catties per mow of vegetable gardening.

Savings on Rent

It has been pointed out that about 70 per cent of all the land in this village was rented land before land reform, and that rent constituted by far the heaviest item in the cost of agricultural production for the majority of the villagers who had insufficient or no land. The Communists had called agricultural rent the foundation of the "feudalistic system of exploitation," and it was the main target for destruction in the process of land reform. Now that land reform had been accomplished, the savings on rent were undoubtedly the most important benefit accruing to the favored poor and landless peasants.

Of the former total of about 840 mow of rented land in the village, 540 mow had been taken out of this category for redistribution. At the average rate of 300 catties per mow, this saved the tenants a total rent of 162,000 catties of unhusked rice for the entire village, about 22 per cent of the total gross yield of 740,000 catties from all the village land.

Formerly, four large landlord families owned 280 mow and used the rent of 84,000 catties of unhusked rice, somewhat over one half of the now abolished rent, to support their families in the village at a high standard of living, and a part of this rent was taken out of the village to the cities. Now those families had fled, and all this rent was retained in the village.

But land reform did not wipe out tenancy entirely, and the law still permitted renting land to others. About 300 of the original 840 mow remained in the private hands of a legally recognized group, the so-called "small land rentiers." Some of these were peasant families without enough labor to operate a farm who rented out a part of their land, usually from a fraction of one mow to two or three mow. The majority were families with adult male members working in the cities who bought small plots of land and rented them out so that their families in the village could have a subsidiary income to the periodic remittances they sent home. After land reform, some of the women in these families went into partnership with close relatives to farm the land instead of renting it out for fear of being identified as landlords. Some such families continued to rent out land because of their advanced age, unwillingness to do farm work, or inability to make joint farming arrangements. Thus, since the poor peasants who acquired free land and most of the middle peasants still urgently needed additional land because the land each family owned remained too small, tenancy still existed, even though vastly reduced. It should be noted, however, that the net proceeds from renting out agricultural land was now so drastically reduced that it was not economical for owners to rent out their land unless they could circumvent the Communist rent ceiling.

Taxes under the New Order

If the abolition of rent from the greater part of the formerly rented land lightened the heaviest burden for the majority of the peasants, this benefit was partly nullified by the fact that taxes levied by the Communists were much heavier than those imposed by previous governments. In the pre-Communist period, medium-grade irrigated land paid a tax of about 13 per cent of the gross yield, and all grades of land in the village paid an average of about 10 per cent of the total gross yield. But the average tax rate in this area during 1949 to 1951 was about 30 per cent of the gross yield, a tax which included agricultural tax (formerly called land tax), a local levy of five catties of unhusked rice per mow to help support the village school, and a levy of varying amounts for helping to defray the cost of the subdistrict police force. The last two levies were imposed not by formal tax regulations, but by local cadres independently.

The peasants' burden of taxation under the Communist government is a controversial subject, partly because of the variations in the manner of collection by local cadres in various areas and partly because of the lack of factual information aside from published government regulations and generalized formal reports. Government regulations in 1951 expected the average peasants to pay from 11 to 15 per cent of the gross yield, with a higher rate for rich peasants who worked their land with a substantial amount of hired labor. These rates continued to prevail in the regulations of 1952.[2] A rate between 11 and 15 per cent was assigned to a peasant on the basis of the estimate made partly from the quality of the land and partly from what the cadres judged as the appropriate labor capacity of the peasant.

As these regulations were carried out in Nanching, the average tax burden actually exceeded the limit of 11 to 15 per cent. Rural cadres, eager to fulfill their quota of tax collection, often assigned a higher yield for a piece of land than the occupying family could normally make it produce, with the result that a large number of peasants were paying more than the regulations intended. Raising the production quota was a common means employed by the cadres to induce the peasants to increase the yield in order to execute the policy of increasing production. One report stated that in Ch'ao-an county, about 100 miles east of Nanching, where an agricultural tax of 33 per cent was levied on a production quota of 540 catties of unhusked rice per mow, the local cadres in 1953 raised the quota to 800 catties with an additional 18 per cent of tax on a progressive basis, making a rate of 51 per cent of the yield for one mow.[3] Compared to such cases, the average of 30 per cent of the gross yield in Nanching was relatively light.

Aside from agricultural taxes paid directly by the peasants, there were other types of levies that affected the peasants directly or indirectly. There were, for example, levies for education and the police force in Nanching. Although in another county in this province there were levies on pigs raised at home, water buffaloes, and houses, and a variety of police protection fees,[4] we did not hear of any of these being collected in Nanching. There were also other collections by the government that amounted to taxation in the sense that they were financial burdens imposed by a political power. In the last months of 1949 there was the "government loan to support the battle front." Several merchant-landlord families in Nanching had to subscribe heavily, but the peasants were not bothered. In the spring and summer of 1950 there was a victory bond campaign. Again, the merchant-landlord families were the heaviest subscribers, with the village as a whole given a quota of only 50 units (about $15.00). The clans used school funds to pay for this. In 1951 and 1952 there were "Resist America and Aid Korea" donations.

Village Production and Consumption

With the foregoing information in view, we can make a rough estimate of the balance of production and consumption for the village as a whole.

In the first place, production was affected by a reduction of about seventy mow of vegetable gardens, the reason for which was twofold. When the Communist soldiers came to Canton and its suburbs in the latter part of 1949, they sent parties to Nanching to buy vegetables and meats. They would offer only a half of the current market price, and when the peasants refused to sell, the soldiers descended upon the vegetable patches, picked all that they wanted, paid the peasants the half price, and left. They did the same with pigs and chickens. As a consequence, by the time of spring planting in 1950 many peasants turned their vegetable patches into paddy fields, and many paddy fields that had gone through the three years of rotation and were ready to be turned into vegetable patches remained as paddy fields. After the summer of 1950, when a large part of the troops in the vicinity moved on to other places, forced buying at low prices no longer occurred; but by then the restriction of foreign trade with Hong Kong began to affect the marketing of vegetables grown here, particularly the leeks in which the village specialized. Local vegetable prices also saw a small decline in this period.

With this change, the gross production of the village in 1951 is estimated as follows: 670 mow of rice produced 469,000 catties of unhusked rice, 130 mow of vegetable produced 182,000 catties of unhusked rice, 400 mow of dry land produced 40,000 catties of unhusked rice, and the total gross yield for 1,200 mow was 691,000 catties of unhusked rice. Since the total gross yield of the entire village in the pre-Communist period was 740,000 catties, there was a decline of 49,000 catties, or 6.6 per cent, due to the shrinkage of vegetable acreage.

There was now no absentee rent to be taken out of the village after land reform, but there was an average of 30 per cent of the gross yield for taxes, or 207,300 catties, to be deducted, leaving a rough net yield of 483,700 catties of unhusked rice or 314,400 catties of husked rice for consumption within the village. This represented a reduction of 131,300 catties of unhusked rice from the pre-Communist net yield of 615,000 catties, a reduction of about 20 per cent.

Up until 1951 we discerned no sign of increased consumption among the villagers in general. The Communist press reported cases of poor peasants who, having acquired land, were able to eat better or buy new clothes, but there did not seem to be many such cases from our observations. The high living standard of the landlords was gone, and the rich peasants and the upper portion of the middle peasants now had a much lower standard of living. Any possible increase of consumption among some poor peasants might be balanced by the decrease of consumption among the richer portion of the village population. Therefore, it may be assumed that the entire village's minimum requirement for subsistence remained the same as in the pre-Communist period, that is, approximately 391,000 catties of husked rice a year. But the village was now producing only 314,000 catties of husked rice a year; and there was therefore a deficit of about 77,400 catties or 19.4 per cent. As in the case of the pre-Communist figure of net yield, we have not deducted the 7.0 per cent cost of fertilizer and seeds from this figure. Should we deduct 7.0 per cent from the yield, the deficit would be raised to 26.4 per cent.

In the pre-Communist period the net yield of the village was about equal to the village's total needs, but that seemingly self-sufficient picture obscured the fact that a small number of rich families consumed much more than the average peasants, a large number of whom were not able to meet their own needs. Now, land reform having abolished the high-living minority, there was a relatively uniform standard of living among the majority of the families; the over-all figure of net yield for the whole village reflected more closely the economic conditions of all the individual families. The most important factor in the new deficit was that the proportion of the yield removed from the village by Communist taxes was greater than the combined total of pre-Communist taxes and the part of absentee rent taken to the cities, the new taxes being a total of 30.0 per cent of the gross yield of the whole village.

Family Income and Consumption and Size of Farm

In estimating family consumption, the pre-Communist annual requirement of 2,141 catties of husked rice for a family of five is retained as the norm for the post–land-reform period, on the assumption that no significant general rise in consumption had yet occurred by 1951.

In estimating the gross income of the average family, we retain the pre-Communist yield of 700 catties of unhusked rice per mow of rice crop as the norm for reasons already stated. For estimating the net income, the following figures of costs were used. Taxes took 30 per cent of the gross yield, the heaviest item. Fertilizer and seeds remained the same as in the pre-Communist period, i.e., 7 per cent of the gross yield, as no general increase in this item appeared possible in this area at this stage of development of the new economic order. If the land was rented, the general rate of rent was 35 per cent of the gross yield instead of the former 43 per cent, owing to the imposition of a rent ceiling by the Communist government.

On these bases, the cost of production for one mow of land owned by the peasant and planted in rice crop was 37 per cent of the gross yield, which included 30 per cent for taxes and 7 per cent for fertilizer and seeds. In both cases, the cost of labor has not been included because of the wide differences in the amount of hired help used on different farms during the pre-Communist period and the general prevalence of self-labor, making the two situations noncomparable.

In the pre-Communist period a peasant tilling his own land would receive about 80 per cent of the gross yield, whereas now he received 63 per cent, or 17 per cent less than before. From one mow of rented land, the peasant used to get 40 per cent of the gross yield, whereas he now got 58 per cent, or 9 per cent more than in the pre-Communist days. For a person who rented out one mow of land, the normal rate of rent used to be 43 per cent and the tax rate 13 per cent for average irrigated land; he received about 30 per cent of the gross yield from his tenant. But now, while the rate of rent was only 35 per cent of the gross yield, the tax rate had hiked to 30 per cent, so he obtained a net income of about 5 per cent of the gross yield. Previously, evasion of a part of the land tax was a common practice with large landowners; but now large landowners were gone, and under rigid Communist surveillance with the help of the peasants' association leaders who had intimate knowledge of village affairs, evasion of taxes became difficult. There was no longer shifting of the tax burden by the big fellows to the average peasants, but the now more equalized burden was heavier for everybody. This tax factor accounted for the main difference in net income between the Communist and the pre-Communist periods.

From these norms of net income per mow in different types of operations, it is possible to estimate the new level of family income of the peasants in Nanching. Of the some 130 families that acquired a share of land from land reform, about 100 families were former poor peasants and farm laborers, and these 100-odd families now became the politically and economically decisive group. They furnished the larger proportion of the peasants' association leaders, owned an aggregate of 620 mow which comprised slightly over half of all the village land, and remained the numerically predominant group among the village peasants as before. Since in the redistribution of land each person in this group got slightly less than one mow regardless of sex and age, and the average size of the family in this village was 4.8 persons, a family of five received somewhat less than five mow of land. This acreage approached the size of a farm of the upper portion of the poor peasants and the lower portion of the middle peasants in the pre–land-reform days, but the difference was that, while the farm was formerly mostly rented land, it was now rent-free.

From five mow of land for which the peasant paid no rent he reaped a gross yield of about 3,500 catties of unhusked rice if the land was all planted in rice crop. From this figure, 37 per cent or 1,295 catties should be deducted for taxes and for the cost of fertilizer and seeds. This would leave a net yield of 2,245 catties of unhusked or about 1,457 catties of husked rice for the family's consumption. Since the average family of five needed about 2,141 catties of husked rice to meet the minimum annual need, there was a deficit of 684 catties or almost 32 per cent of the annual yield. To make up for this deficit by farming, the peasant would have either to rent about 1.7 mow of land if he planted only rice or devote a part of his five rent-free mow to vegetable gardening. But most of the formerly rented land being no longer for rent, the peasant had difficulty in finding land to rent.

By far the more common way to meet the deficit was to devote a part of the farm to vegetable gardening. The post–land-reform economy of one mow of vegetable garden was as follows:

Gross yield: equivalent of 1,400 c.u.r. (catties of unhusked rice)
Costs: taxes, 30 per cent of gross yield, or 420 c.u.r.; fertilizer and seeds, 15 per cent of gross, or 210 c.u.r.; total cost, 45 per cent of gross, or 630 c.u.r.
Net yield: 55 per cent of gross, or 770 c.u.r. or 500 catties of husked rice

At this estimated rate of net yield from one mow of vegetables, the peasant had to devote three mow of his land to rice and two mow to vegetables in order to get a net income of 2,128 catties of husked rice to meet approximately his family's annual need of 2,141 catties. Actually, this proportion of devoting 40 per cent of the farm to vegetables and the rest to rice had been a common practice among the poor peasants and most of the middle peasants in this village. This observation was substantiated by the result of a survey made by the combined efforts of the Canton Municipal Agricultural Bureau, the South China Agricultural College and the Central-South Institute of Scientific Research which stated: ". . . Over 50 per cent of the Canton suburban peasants depend upon vegetable gardening as a vital source of income . . . vegetable crops supply about 40 per cent of the family's annual income for the average suburban peasant." [5] Although made in 1953, the report reflected Nanching's situation in 1951 as we observed it.

In this proportion between rice and vegetable acreage, the peasant family now with five mow of rent-free land could meet their minimum needs during the year. The existence was still precarious and savings remained negligible, but this was better than the pre–land-reform poor peasant who farmed six mow of land, of which 1.2 mow was self-owned and 4.8 mow were rented, giving him a net yield of 1,507 catties of husked rice and a deficit of 30 per cent of his family's annual need. This was also better than the pre–land-reform example of poor peasant Wong Mi, who worked a farm of six mow, of which one was his own and five were rented, and on which three mow were in rice and three in vegetables. This operation netted him only 1,950 catties of husked rice.

In the period before land reform, a family which could meet their average annual need without deficit was considered a member of the middle-peasant class. On this basis rested the Communist claim that land reform had elevated the poor peasants and farm laborers to the status of middle peasants. The difficulty here, however, was the shrinkage of the vegetable acreage. This seemed to be a difficulty not only for Nanching. That it applied also to other villages in the suburban area was reflected in the fact that the Communist survey just cited was made partly for the purpose of developing a domestic and foreign market for vegetables to counteract the decline in vegetable acreage.

After land reform, the middle peasants in the village generally appeared able to maintain a self-sufficient status without incurring a deficit. But middle peasants farming ten mow and over were fewer than before, and the majority of them now farmed only seven or eight mow. The reduction in size of the middle peasant's farm was a significant fact in the new economic order, due partly to the shortage of land for rent. In cases where some rental land could be had, even a farm of eight mow, with four mow hypothetically self-owned and four mow rented from others, would still bring the operator an annual net yield of 3,363 catties of unhusked or 2,186 catties of husked rice if all of the farm were devoted to rice crop. This net yield would meet the family's annual consumption requirement of 2,141 catties of husked rice, and the family budget could be balanced. Actually, the net income would be somewhat above this figure, for a part of the farm was normally given to the high-yielding vegetable crop. But should the peasant fail to find land to rent, his economic status would be reduced to that of the poorer peasants who had received land from the land reform.

Rich peasants as a group were sharply reduced in number in this area after land reform, although some new ones seemed to have appeared and some former ones became re-established after 1951, as suggested in the Communist press. The major factor here was the same as in the reduction of the size of the middle peasants' farm, namely the redistribution of land they formerly rented from landlords. The rich peasants of Nanching differed from those in some other types of rural communities in that a large part of their farms consisted of rented land. Confiscation of land owned by some rich peasants also played a part. Most of the land of two rich peasants, the former head and the secretary of the Crop Protection Association, was confiscated for redistribution, leaving their families with only a portion determined by the number of family members on the same basis as peasants who acquired redistributed land. The only outstanding rich peasant left in the village was Wong Yung, who used to farm 70 mow. In 1951 he farmed only the 30 mow of his own land which had not been touched by land reform. As a whole, the former rich peasants became middle peasants operating farms of 10 mow or less. Their living was still comfortable as compared to the average standard of the village, and they faced no financial deficit. But there was not enough rentable land, and they did not have much enthusiasm for investing capital and labor for expansion of the farm in the period immediately following land reform.

The general reduction in the size of the farm among the former upper portion of the villagers meant at least a temporary setback in the total production of the village, for this group had the capital, equipment, and enterprising management for high productivity. The Communist policy was to develop mutual-aid teams and agricultural producers' co-operatives in order to enlarge the general unit of farm operation; but up till 1951 one saw only the leveling tendency in the size of farms at the expense of the former upper minority of the village peasants. Eliminated was the situation where five large families, or about 2 per cent of all the families in the village, owned 310 mow of the best land, almost 26 per cent of the village's crop area. Now the 100-odd families of poor and landless peasants, about 43.5 per cent of the village's families, who used to own about 80 mow, or about 6.6 per cent of the village's land, owned 620 mow, or about 51.7 per cent of the village land, a percentage commensurate with their numerical proportion to the village population and in theory at least enough to enable them to make ends meet.

Shortage of Agricultural Credit

The new system of land ownership did not mean all smooth sailing for the newly favored families that acquired rent-free land. One outstanding problem was the lack of agricultural capital and rural credit. These families had always been short of agricultural capital and found it difficult to obtain credit; and even after acquiring land from land reform they faced the customary lack of tools and fertilizer and other items requiring investment, a typical situation in villages which had gone through land reform.

After the establishment of Communist rule in Nanching, and especially after land reform, credit became extremely short. While there were many calls for loans, few people were willing to lend money even to relatives and close friends, and no new credit society, a traditional device, was organized in the village in 1951. The shop in Pingan Chen that used to do a limited amount of business in lending money to peasants no longer continued the practice, and another pawnship in a neighboring village to which the desperate peasants used to turn for a loan was now closed and the manager detained by the government on the charge of usury. It was nearly impossible to obtain a loan for either production or consumption purposes. Obviously, those in the village who used to have money to lend had either fled or now belonged to the dispossessed class and had sunk into the position where they themselves could well use a loan; but the major factor in the shortage of credit was the Communist campaign against usury and Communist orders permitting peasants to nullify certain types of indebtedness.

Early in the spring of 1950 three men in Pingan Chen were arrested, tortured, and imprisoned on the accusation of lending money to peasants at usurious rates. Several peasants in Nanching who had lent money to others in the village were frightened, for they did not know whether the rates they charged – about 40 per cent per annum – would be considered usurious by the new rulers. Wong Ping, later the chairman of the peasants' association, said of the arrests: "How can you arrest and torture a man for lending money to others? Even if the rate of interest is high, the loan is contracted on the free will of the debtor." His opinion was changed after Communist indoctrination.

Although no arrests for usury were made in Nanching, the villagers were all aware of Communist policies and that the violation of Communist law could cost a man his life.

Communist regulations on the payment of debts were not alarming except to landlords — whatever credits they had granted, in whatever form, and in whatever stage of repayment were completely nullified. Loans granted by rich peasants were only partially affected. A debtor who had paid a rich peasant an amount of interest equal to the principal might stop paying interest but had to repay the principal; should the interest paid be twice the amount of the principal or over, no further payment needed to be made on either the interest or the principal. This stipulation appeared essentially fair to the peasants. Indebtedness contracted between other classes of peasants remained effective and binding.

But the details of these regulations were not carefully explained to the peasants; and some poor peasants, after hearing that it was no longer necessary to pay one's debts, simply refused to honor any of their contracted obligations regardless of their nature. The creditors, even though they might not be landlords or rich peasants, were now thoroughly frightened by the insufficiently understood government policy and did not dare to argue with the debtors. Even though there were not many such incidents in Nanching, because of the strength of the traditional sense of moral obligation and the kinship bond among the villagers, people with a little money to lend became wary. Nanching peasants were a people who knew much about customs but little or nothing about laws, and after all, there were the three examples of usurers in Pingan Chen to serve as warning.

The shortage of rural credit was so acute that in 1951 it was difficult for some poor peasants to get enough to eat in the late spring period, the time of the year traditionally known as the time of "spring famine" because the previous autumn crop had been largely consumed and the new crop was not yet harvested. Although the Communist government, aware of the critical situation, issued orders to the peasants who might have savings to lend them to those facing acute need and placed no restrictions on the rate of interest,[6] it was doubtful whether this action had any substantial effect on easing the minds of those peasants who might have had some savings to lend.

Beginning in 1951, therefore, the People's Bank was ordered to make agricultural loans to the peasants twice a year, in the spring and again in the fall. However, such loans appeared to be limited in size when compared with the needs. In addition, since about half of the funds earmarked for agricultural loans was granted for basic improvements such as water control and irrigation projects and to buy machine water pumps to start the process of mechanization of agriculture, less than one-half of the funds was intended to meet the immediate needs of agricultural production such as the purchase of fertilizer and seeds and farm tools.

No statistical figures on agricultural credit are available for 1951, but figures for 1953 seem to show a continuation of the credit shortage which we observed in 1951. Early in 1953, the Canton branch of the People's Bank made available to the suburban peasants an agricultural credit totaling 2.5 billion dollars of the inflated People's Currency (about $125,000 United States currency at the official exchange rate). Out of this sum, 1.2 billion was earmarked for loans for buying fertilizer, seeds, tools, and farm animals. The suburban area to which the loans applied was inhabited by some 200,000 peasants.[7] Assuming that one-fourth of the farm population needed to borrow money for production purposes, the average size of a loan for a family of five would be about 12,000 dollars People's Currency (approximately 60 cents United States currency). This amount was equivalent to the value of about 20 catties of unhusked rice, and would buy only 40 per cent of the fertilizer needed for one mow of rice crop. Although we do not know how Nanching as a part of the suburban area benefited by this loan, this calculation serves as an indication of the limited character of the agricultural loans made at that time by the Communist government to alleviate the acute shortage of rural credit.

Opportunities for Supplementary Income

As indicated, livelihood for the newly elevated poor peasants remained precarious, and some form of supplementary income was still necessary to the economy of the peasant family. In Nanching there were some changes in the channels of supplementary income, especially in the handicraft of embroidery and the customary seasonal work in Canton, both of which relied upon the city's economic conditions.

General business conditions in the city of Canton in the early years of Communist rule were not bright. Especially hard hit were the luxury trades, which included embroidery, a prominent item in Nanching's home industry. Domestic buying power for such products was drastically cut by the repeated heavy levies imposed upon the business class in the city. Export trade was also severely curtailed by government monopoly in leading fields of imports and exports. Consequently, beginning from the latter part of 1950, less than a dozen families in Nanching were still able to obtain some embroidery work from the city shops, and even these families sometimes failed to get any work.

Much more important than embroidery had been the opportunity for seasonal work in Canton and in Hong Kong. In the first two months of 1951 many poor and landless peasants failed to obtain the usual seasonal jobs such as stevedoring on the water front and digging and carrying dirt and crushing rocks for municipal and private construction projects. Water-front shipping declined sharply. Unemployment in the city was high, and the Communist government reserved unskilled construction jobs such as repairing and surfacing streets for registered unemployed urban residents as a means of public work relief. With the "five anti" movement against corruption in the city business class causing widespread business failures in 1952, thus adding discharged workers to the ranks of the unemployed, the volume of unemployment showed no sign of diminishing in that year. In the first part of 1953, Canton's unemployed were reported to number in the neighborhood of 130,000, who, together with their dependents, accounted for a sizable percentage of the city's population of somewhat over a million.[8] Thus the prospect was poor for seasonal job seekers from Nanching and other nearby villages. As for opportunities in Hong Kong, they were limited by political restrictions against emigration to foreign lands and vastly reduced by the over-congested situation in that city, where refugees from China's mainland were taking up every available occupation for bare subsistence.

Eight or ten peasants in Nanching still continued to depend on peddling for a supplementary income, and peddling remained a source for balancing the family budget for a limited number of families. But this trade was becoming more difficult. Whereas formerly anyone could peddle freely, now it was necessary to obtain a peddler's license from the municipal government and pay a fee before one was allowed to peddle and such licenses were not always granted because of the overcrowding of this traditionally open field. The urban economy in the early years after land reform no longer could perform the traditional function of cushioning the shock of economic difficulties in the countryside.

In sum, the acquisition of rent-free land by the poor and landless peasants was a major factor in alleviating the economic difficulties of the largest group in the village; but, with the acute shortage of credit, with many supplementary occupational activities curtailed, and with the traditional safety valve of emigration severely reduced by urban unemployment, the economic situation of even this favored group remained precarious.

CHAPTER XII

Establishing the New Power Structure

THE INTERLOCKING nature of economic and political power in the Communist system of rule made alterations of the economic and political structures inseparable parts of the revolutionary process aimed at changing the basic pattern of Chinese society. In Nanching, as elsewhere in China, the economic changes which we have just reviewed were accompanied, therefore, by an equally sweeping political transformation. In the context of the national scene, Nanching represents a southern suburban type of village in which the changes can be viewed at the basic, grass-roots level.

In Canton, on a cool clear mid-October day in 1949, when Nationalist soldiers planted explosives and set off the shattering blast which destroyed the steel bridge spanning the Pearl River, the struggle for power was over both for Canton and for its suburban area of which Nanching was a part. That terrific explosion, shaking the windows in the village, announced to the villagers that the old government which had ruled them and had collected taxes from them was now vanquished; a new power which they had long heard about with mixed feelings had finally arrived.

In a few days, small well-armed detachments of Communist soldiers came to Pingan Chen and then to Nanching, where they posted notices announcing the annulment of the previous political organization and commanding the former government personnel to remain in their old posts until their duties and official documents were transferred to the new personnel. In about a week, that transfer was accomplished. The entire *pao chia* system was abolished as being oppressive to the people, but the subdistrict government in Pingan Chen and its relationship with Nanching was essentially preserved. With the *pao* and *chia* heads removed from their duties, the abolition of the old formal government was completed so far as the village was concerned.

Since, as we have seen, formal government had never played a major role in public affairs and in maintaining peace and order here, the abolition of the old government merely scratched the surface of the local power structure. The crucial step in the destruction of the old political order was the removal of elements of local power and authority, initiated by the disarming of all groups and individuals possessing firearms. Pingan Chen and Nanching were notified that any organization or individual with firearms must surrender them to the subdistrict office, and detachments of soldiers came into the village to look up the local leaders and demand their guns.

Informed that the outstanding armed group in Nanching was the Crop Protection Association, the Communist cadres moved to disarm and destroy this organization. Each member was questioned closely, some were tortured, and hidden guns were squeezed out. Communist efforts were thorough and relentless. One member of the association, a poor peasant whom someone accused of possessing a gun, was arrested and tortured in order to force him to surrender the alleged gun and to inform on others who possessed arms. After months in prison he was released when a group of close relatives pooled their resources to buy a locally made revolver which they handed over to the soldiers. The association as an organization ceased to exist.

Since the dozen-odd rifles belonging to the clans were the first arms handed over to the new authority, the clans ceased to function as coercive organizations supported by armed might. Their informal authority was simultaneously weakened by the disintegration of their formal organization, the destruction of their economic foundation, and the weakening of their internal status system.

The power of individual wealthy families such as Family A simply disappeared when such families fled to Hong Kong beyond the reach of the Communist law, and when their houses and land, the economic foundation of their power, were confiscated during land reform.

The Lion's Club was disbanded by the Communist cadres, the Communists holding that such clubs were "martial organizations" and that their leaders, many of whom were associated with rebellious secret societies, were potential reactionary agents of the Kuomintang and imperialists. Thus, another power group in the village was destroyed.

Of all the former local centers of power, only the old gentry group, which had been losing its traditional position in the local power structure during the past two or three decades, continued to live out their last days of physical existence in an ignored corner of community life. In this suburban village, where Confucian conceptions of life had already been relegated to a secondary position and where the gentry possessed no firearms and did not command a following of those who did, the Communists did not regard gentry elements as dangerous. We saw Lee Ying several times after the Communist take-over and asked him what he thought of the new situation. He was hesitant and cautious in his replies, being careful not to criticize the existing situation.

In an amazingly short time the Communists abolished the old system of formal government in Nanching and completely disintegrated the informal local structure of power and authority which had been the traditional foundation of the village life.

The agents of the new government who entered Nanching and its vicinity in October of 1949 were not civilian officials or unarmed cadres but fully armed military officers and soldiers whose guns were symbolic of the coercive nature of the new power. Mao Tse-tung truly had said, "A revolution is no invitation to a feast." On October 1, 1950, some three or four thousand people in the general vicinity, including a group of representatives from Nanching, gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the establishment of the Chinese People's Republic by the Communists. As the crowd marched column by column through a narrow entrance into the open field, everyone could plainly see rows of formidable machine guns manned by soldiers deployed on the high grounds on either side.

One morning in the early part of 1951 peasants in the vicinity were horrified to see sixteen dead bodies lying in a pool of blood on a military drilling ground less than a mile from Nanching. The village people recognized only one of the bodies, that of a middle-aged man from a nearby village, a poor peasant of shady character who gambled habitually and was known to be connected with local gangsters. Another was that of an old man with a long beard, and the villagers wondered who he was. No crimes of the dead were ever announced, and no public trial had been held for them. Nobody knew why these victims had met their tragic end; and a nameless fear spread among the spectators and those who heard about it.

Communist pronouncements emphasized that the show of arms, the prisons and detention houses, and the examples of punishment by death were not intended for the vast majority of the common people but only for the minority who chose to be "enemies of the people." But the definition of "enemy" was not clear to the common people; and it changed from time to time. In the first months following the Communist take-over, thieves were left alone, but after that they were treated severely. Staff members in an American missionary school near the village did not become "enemies of the people" until the "Resist America and Aid Korea" movement was fully developed. They were then treated as enemies and several Chinese faculty members were imprisoned. Even some landlords were safe until the "struggle" by the masses against them was launched, and then they were transferred to the category of "enemies."

People naturally began to wonder whether they themselves might not someday be regarded as enemies and become objects of violence. The several arrests and imprisonments of persons in the village, the bloody bodies on the drilling field, the frightening stories of imprisonment and death on a variety of political charges unfamiliar to the villagers — all these made fear an integral part of the new political reality under which they now lived, and whether the stories which circulated were true did not affect the tense situation. To be sure, there was still laughter in the village, but less often than before, and certainly not while discussing public matters, especially political situations.

Sheer coercion was not the only means by which the Communist government asserted its power and authority. It also sought to win the voluntary support of the people. After land reform, a large number of benefited families came to feel that the Communist government served their interests; and Communist cadres sent to the village became welcome guests among many peasant families, where they tried to instill the idea that the Communist Party worked for the poor, as demonstrated by land reform, and to encourage the peasants to thank the Communist Party for its "favors and affection."

"Favors and affection" (*en ch'ing*) is a term for describing intimate personal relations. Under the imperial government there had been a familiar saying, "Imperial favors are as great as the sea is deep"; for in the traditional paternalistic political ideology the sentiment of "favors and affection" was often employed in reference to the relationship between the people and the imperial power — but only among the officials and the literati who were the direct beneficiaries of the "favors and affection" bestowed by the emperor, not among the common people. In the Republican period, since government benefits for the people were considered a matter of the government's rightful duty, the term was not heard. Now it was revived by the Communists in a bid for popular support, a technique of positive inducement which, in terms of "favors and affection" through land reform, reached an immeasurably larger proportion of people than the officials and literati of the imperial days.

We wondered if the resurrection of this traditional paternalistic political sentiment could offset the fear in the hearts of the peasants. We sensed that in Nanching it appeared to be increasingly accepted by the families which benefited by land reform.

The Communist local power structure was composed of three major branches: the formal government, the local groups of power and authority, and the Communist Party, which performed the unifying function between the first two branches. The new structure of government in the Nanching area was not very different from the past, except for the abolition of the *pao chia* system. The new administrative chiefs of this village were the village head and vice-head. They were part of the personnel composing the next larger political unit, the *hsiang* or administrative village, which was composed of several villages in the same neighborhood. The administrative village was in turn under the authority of the *ch'ü* or subdistrict government, located as before in Pingan Chen for this subdistrict. The subdistrict government was subordinated to the municipal government of Canton. From Canton, the line of authority reached up to the provincial and central governments. Level by level, the system of formal government linked the village with the central governing body in Peking. The major difference between this system of local government and the previous one was in the replacement of the former *pao chia* organization with the offices of village head and vice-head, which was reinstatement of an old practice that existed before the Nationalist reactivation of the *pao chia.*

Like its predecessor, the system of local government was primarily an organization for the enforcement of laws and the execution of orders imposed from above; as such, it did not implement local initiative. But it differed from the previous local government, in a very significant sense. Whereas the former system handled only a minimum amount of business, chiefly the collection of taxes and sometimes the maintenance of general peace and order, the interests of the new subdistrict and village governments extended far beyond taxation and public security to cover matters most intimate to the individual peasant's life, such as the handling of a loan for his farm and even the orientation of his thought. The new formal government drove deep into a realm of local life that used to be the autonomous concern of the individual, the family, and at times the authority of the village community.

Both the village head and vice-head were appointed by the subdistrict government. One of the major functions of the local Communist cadres working in the village was to discover "activists" among peasants outside of the previous ruling circle and to use them as the core of a new village leadership; both the head and the vice-head of the village were selected from such activists to be the leaders of the new order. The village head thus selected was a young peasant in his late twenties from the Lee clan. He had had a few years of middle-school education in the city and was a mild-mannered intelligent young man whose father, an emigrant to Hong Kong, had died some years before. When his family had become poor he had gone to work in the rice mill in Pingan Chen to supplement the rent from his three or four mow of land.

The vice-head of the village was a controversial figure. The younger brother of Wong Hua-ying, head of the former Crop Protection Association, he was known to the villagers for meddling in the gambling racket, opium traffic, and other gangster activities. He was forced to hide beyond the village for quite a few months while Communist soldiers from Pingan Chen sought to retrieve a gun said to be in his possession, but after the discovery of Wong Hua-ying's connections with former navigation protection activities he became important in the eyes of the local cadres. Because he had always harbored hostility against his elder brother, he told the cadres details of the latter's associations and activities. For this contribution to the cadres' knowledge of the local community and its personalities, he was selected as an activist and recommended for and appointed as the vice-head of the village. Such a man was locally referred to as a "bad element."

For some months after the elimination of the armed groups in the village Nanching was in effect unarmed, but early in the spring of 1950 the government organized a "people's militia" in the village, the fifteen-odd members being selected mainly from the poor peasants, and they were issued six guns. Organizationally the Nanching Militia was under the control of the municipal Bureau of Public Security, which issued arms, sent officers to train the members, and assigned duties, and was a part of the larger organizations of militia of the administrative village and the subdistrict. As such it was wholly subject to the tight chain of command which reached from the national public security (police) authorities through the provincial and municipal levels to the subdistrict, the administrative village, and the natural village units. Local autonomy became a thing of the past.

So far as political action was concerned, the peasants' association was in effect the new center of village power. At its core was a committee of seven members and its chairman. Its membership in 1951 was about 150, representing a majority of the 230 village families, including mostly the former poor and landless peasants and a fair number of middle peasants. Excluded were rich peasants and former landlords, who could join only after their class status had been changed by five years of physical labor on a farm without exploiting others and without engaging in counterrevolutionary activities. The core committee was selected from the activists by the cadres and formally approved in a nominal election by the membership, a process of election not substantially different in procedure from the traditional election of clan officers such as the clan business manager. Although the customary pre-election consultations were widely publicized in Communist propaganda, the Communist cadres apparently made their selection of candidates with little consideration for the villagers' opinions in many cases.

There was one committee member whom the villagers had always regarded as an undesirable character. He had been in the gambling racket, and in the summer of 1949 shortly before the arrival of the Communists, in an attempt to borrow some money from the seeress in the village, he had obtained a revolver and tried to gain admission into her home by shooting off the lock; but the cadres were impressed by his poverty and by his comments on village personalities and affairs. On the other hand, the chairman, Wong Ping, obviously enjoyed popular support. He was literate, always enthusiastic about public activities in the village, and knew a great deal about the economic status of individual families because he had been an accountant for different families on ceremonial occasions such as weddings or funerals. The last qualification strengthened his position in the association which, as its first major assignment, had to deal with classifying the economic status of each family for land reform. Moreover, he was a mild tempered man and knew the basic Confucian classics, which made him acceptable to the older generation.

The composition of the native leadership, in both the new village government and in village organizations such as the peasants' association, presented a difference from the pre-Communist picture in the sense that the new men were elevated from the middle and poor peasants, while the old leadership stemmed mainly from the rich peasants and landlords, especially the latter. To this extent, the class basis of the local power structure had definitely shifted.

Official regulations stipulated that the chief functions of the peasants' association were to protect and develop the peasants' welfare and interests; and the villagers now turned to it in public matters formerly handled by the clan authorities and other old power groups — the maintenance of dikes, the repair of roads, the settlement of inter-family disputes, the general overseeing of social and political order in the village, and the financing of the village school. In the association's early stage the party cadres sent into the village supplied the initiative, made the decisions, and helped organize the members for action.

The New Democratic Youth League and the Women's Association in Pingan Chen had branches in Nanching; and, although they were popular organizations, both had considerable influence on the local political order. Two of the committee members of the peasants' association were also League members. In carrying out political campaigns like the "suppression of counterrevolutionists" campaign in early 1951, both the League and the Women's Association co-operated by sending members to spread propaganda and to ferret out the hidden enemy. Although no hidden enemy was found in Nanching, the campaign and its propaganda barrage caused tenseness in the village atmosphere. The villagers talked with care in the presence of the League members, for such individuals were ready informants for the cadres.

The striking fact that emerges from a comparison of the foregoing picture with the pre-Communist village scene is the much closer integration of the village into the national system of political power. Our observations in Nanching provided first-hand evidence of Communist success in establishing a generally stronger tie between the one million-odd villages in the country and the nation, a development which moved China perceptibly closer to the structural reality of a modern state and immensely increased the collective strength of the nation's central political power. Our data on Nanching, even though limited to the early transitional stage, clearly revealed the basic factors in that development: the all-powerful systematic control of the Communist Party, its tremendous propaganda efforts, and the multi-functional penetration of the Communist influence into the village life.

The systematic Communist control brought about a change in the basic pattern of power structure — from an informal balance of power among local influential groups to a formalized mono-center system subjecting all organized groups under a single central direction. This change facilitated the integration of the village into the national political order.

This integration resulted not only from instituting an organizational system of centralized control, but also from altering the attitudes of the peasants through intensive propaganda campaigns. Even in the rural setting of Nanching, there were the mass meetings, the small-group discussions, the operation of the "propaganda network," the newspaper reading groups where an educated leader read to the illiterate peasants, the "wall newspapers" (hand-written news bulletins pasted on walls at public places) to remedy the lack of a printing press, the countless posters bearing political slogans, and the indoctrination classes. If previously the vast majority of the peasants had never seen a map showing the village's position in the province and in the nation, they now saw such maps on wall newspapers or on posters which were explained to them by the cadres or the literate activists. If previously it was the unique qualification of the educated man to talk about the affairs of the world, the peasants were now required to listen to such talk and to learn to parrot such talk themselves. Regardless of whether the peasants' thoughts and attitudes underwent genuine transformation, there was little doubt that a whole range of new social and political concepts on the national level were being pressed into their consciousness, thus broadening the peasant mind from the narrow confine of the village world to the national political order.

Finally, integration of the village community to the national political order was effected through functional control of village life by the centralized organizational system. To every Nanching peasant the national political power had become a concrete reality. It had brought land reform. It now decided the social and economic status of each individual, the orientation of his thought, his happiness or misery, even his life or death. It decreed the way in which marriage should take place and directed the manner in which children should be raised by organizing nurseries, by taking over the village school and by organizing the young for guided group activities and political discipline. It had, indeed, penetrated the peasant's whole life.

We had seen in Nanching a microcosm of one of the most sweeping political revolutions in Chinese history, transforming a nation from a decentralized pattern of political structure composed of a loose conglomeration of innumerable semi-autonomous villages to a highly centralized pattern in which the village community was integrated into the national system of political power.

CHAPTER XIII

Alterations in the Kinship System

ALTERATION OF the traditional Chinese kinship system was one of the significant objectives of the "family revolution" which had been gathering force for some fifty years before the Communists came to power; but in the pre-Communist period it was confined to the upper and middle classes in the urban centers. The national success of the Communist revolution was followed by official action which not only quickened the tempo of change of the kinship system but also caused a rapid extension of that change from the upper and middle classes to the urban working class and from the urban centers to the countryside.

The first concrete evidence of such action in the neighborhood of Nanching was the introduction of the new marriage law. Toward the end of 1950 a notice was posted in front of the subdistrict government office in Pingan Chen announcing that henceforth marriages dictated by parents would be illegal, that a marriage must be based on the free will and free choice of the marriage partners, and that all new marriages must now be registered with the subdistrict government in order to be legally recognized. Later a young woman officer came to Nanching, held a meeting with a group of the villagers, and explained these same points. The principles of the government notice and the young woman's speech were not entirely new to the villagers, who lived too close to the big city not to have heard of marriage as a result of free choice of partners; but they had regarded such a marriage as another strange fashion in the strange modern urban living, especially among the "foreignized" rich city folks, without any thought that it could one day apply to their own intimate life.

We observed two marriages in Nanching in 1951 which, in compliance with the new law, were registered at the subdistrict government. In each case, a young cadre member asked the engaged young man and woman whether they had been forced into the marriage by parents or other parties, or were being married of their own free will and choice. Each said it was by free will. The man paid the small registration fee and received a printed marriage certificate, a totally strange object to the villagers, who had never heard of the government taking a hand in the private marital affairs of the people. But appearances were deceiving. In each case the parents in the families concerned had arranged the marriage and prompted the young couple in what to say in going through the registration. Before the marriage, the traditional practice of the boy's family offering the girl's family a ceremonial price was followed – although the new law prohibited paying a "body price" for the bride; and after the registration the full traditional wedding ceremony was enacted in the village, including the clan feast in the ancestral hall.

It was obvious that these Nanching marriages typified the conservative peasants' desire to stick to the old system, a deep-rooted conviction that could not be changed merely by the passage of a new law. In Nanching the individual still depended upon the family for economic security and development, and the parents' will and authority over the children's marriage carried the weight of economic power. A village girl's predominant notion about marriage was still that it provided her a home where she could eat and have children to support her in her old age. Arranged marriage as a means of carrying on family production had been a proven formula of economic security; and until a new system of economic security became equally proven of its worth, it was not easy to induce the peasants to give up economic security for romance. Furthermore, the village clung to the strong tradition of sex segregation, and opportunity for normal social life between the sexes was still too limited for the development of romantic associations. Lee Ying, the old Confucian scholar, at first refused to be interviewed by our girl student investigator. After we convinced him that it was perfectly normal to talk to a young girl, he consented to answering questions, but he talked to her with his face averted, stealing frequent sidelong glances at her.

After the Communists were established in the village, they insisted that both men and women should come to the increasing number of political meetings, and an amateur theatrical group was organized in which boys and girls worked together. The New Democratic Youth League established a branch in the village, and among the small membership in 1951 three or four were girls. These were the small beginnings of a social life between the sexes.

Whereas the effect of Communism on the kinship system as measured by its impact on the traditional marriage procedure was bound to be a gradual one, its destructive influence on the internal kinship status system was immediate. We have already noted the diminishing value of age as a serious factor in the growing difficulty of the older generation in trying to continue the subordination of the young and maintain the social order built on age and generational level. The Communist accession to power greatly accelerated this development. The peasants' association, the new center of power in the village, was mostly staffed by young men under thirty, and Wong Ping, the head of the association, was only in his mid-forties. The New Democratic Youth League branch was a political organization of considerable importance in the public affairs of the village. Older villagers were frightened of its members because of the new power they wielded and fear that they would betray family secrets to the police or cadres. One of the notable features of Communism was that the young, who as a group had never been taken seriously by traditional society or given responsible duties, now came to the fore in social prestige and political importance.

Communist policy aimed explicitly at changing women's status. The new marriage law granted women a higher status in the family and in society than before; and the new legal freedom of divorce gave her an outlet from extreme mistreatment by her husband and mother-in-law. At least one woman in Nanching learned about and used this new right in our time there. Women began to emerge from family confinement to attend meetings and take part in public activities sponsored by the cadres and the peasants' association. The new amateur theatrical group in the village included women, something previously unheard of; and there was a Women's Association in Pingan Chen to which the village sent several women representatives. This association was doing little more than participate in political campaigns under the guidance of local cadres, but the very presence of an independent organization of women dealing with public affairs was in itself a new phenomenon of considerable importance, something entirely out of context with the traditional social order based on sex segregation and the exclusion of women from public affairs.

Land reform had a direct effect on the internal structure of the family. Since land was redistributed not to the family as a whole but to each member on an equal-share basis regardless of age and sex, land reform gave the young and the women an unprecedented sense of importance in contrast to the traditional system of family property ownership, in which the head of the family had sole right to dispose of the family property and female descendants enjoyed no inheritance rights. Moreover, the land reform regulations stipulated that each member of the family might take his or her share of the family land out of the family, for instance in case of a divorce, an egalitarian arrangement of roles of the members and the economic leverage that clearly strengthened the position of the young and the women.

The drastic alterations in the traditional kinship system were most dramatically symbolized by the disintegration of the formal structure of clan authority, the inevitable result not of specific Communist government orders but of the operation of the whole devastating revolutionary process of remaking the village's political and economic life.

Local public affairs were now so much more intimately related to regional politics and formal government than in the pre-Communist period that the elders' council of the clan, ignorant of the new political situation and faced by the rising importance of the modern educated younger generation in this field, were helpless. After the fall of 1950, we did not hear of a single meeting of the elders' council, although more problems involving the whole village had occurred since then than in any previous year that we knew of. The position of business manager as an agency of the clan's formal organization was practically abolished, there being now no clan property to manage as the clan land and other income-yielding properties were redistributed during land reform. Moreover, the Communists arrested many clan managers in other villages on the accusation of embezzlement of clan funds; and official directives on land reform pointed to the office of managing clan finance as a system of "feudalistic exploitation" of the clansmen, a system ridden with corruption and embezzlement.

The "class struggle," especially during the land reform, seriously weakened the solidarity of the clan by introducing a non-kinship criterion of group interest. The peasants' struggle against the landlords, the disclosing of hidden ownership of land to the Communist cadres, the tenants' accusation of cruelty and exploitation against rent collectors, the victims' charges of injustice and oppression by "local bullies," the activists' efforts in ferreting out counterrevolutionaries — all these turned many close kin against each other. The process of struggle had difficulty in getting started, especially when the case involved the young bringing charges against the old, but after the inhibition of kinship was broken down, the struggle became bitter.

We noted that during the Chinese New Year in early 1951 the ancestral halls were no longer cleaned and decorated as before; and no community operas were staged by the clans after land reform. Instead, there were the new recreational groups such as the village theatrical group which were not organized on a clan basis. Ceremonial occasions such as spring and autumn sacrifices to the ancestors were reduced to simple affairs performed only by a small number of older clansmen who also privately contributed toward the sacrificial expense which was formerly financed by the income from the now confiscated clan property. To the Communist cadres, ancestor worship was a superstition like other forms of supernatural worship, and they would do nothing to remedy the situation. Most of the ancestral halls in the village were transformed into classrooms for literacy and political training and offices for the new organizations; they no longer served as places of religious inspiration for the perpetuation and development of the clan.

Our observations in Nanching confirmed the impression that the clan was unlikely ever to recover its traditional importance in the operation of village life, and that the whole kinship framework of collective action, supported by its traditional status system, would diminish in strength while the universalistic type of political and social order would increase its influence.

CHAPTER XIV

Other Social Institutions and Their Initial Change

Literacy and Formal Education

DEFINING EDUCATION broadly as a system of transmission of knowledge and skills from one generation to another, any modern minded observer in Nanching would probably have been struck by the widespread illiteracy and the limited position of formal institutional education in the life of the community. A survey in 1950 showed an over-all literacy rate of about 38 per cent for the village population ten years of age and over, with differential rates of approximately 65 per cent for men and 8 per cent for women.

Two aspects of the traditional peasant situation should be noted here. In the first place, it was obvious that the majority of the peasants were able neither to pay tuition for their children nor to spare them from help in the fields even at an early age. Second, less obvious but just as deeply rooted was the fact that, from a functional viewpoint, literacy and traditional book knowledge had very limited practical significance in the personal life of the majority of the peasants. Since the average peasant acquired the necessary practical knowledge and skill from his family, his kinsmen, and his neighbors or fellow villagers, the process of learning for him lay in his participation in the community life, and not in an independent routine carried on by a separate social institution devoted exclusively to learning. His process of learning was verbal transmission and the observation of examples, which required neither written language nor any instruction apart from actual life; it was "learning through living."

Literacy, the main result from institutional education, served the peasant on very few occasions. Simple, small-scale family farming needed no written accounts or bookkeeping. The peasant usually kept a written account of the expenses of a wedding or a funeral, and he possessed a written deed for his property; but he hired a literate fellow villager to keep such accounts or to read the deeds to him as the occasion arose. He might receive a letter or wish to write one, an infrequent event even for families having emigrants abroad, and for this he similarly enlisted the help of a literate kinsman or friend; or for all purposes requiring literacy he could go to Pingan Chen on a market day and pay the scribe for such service. On street corners in a big city or in the less busy section of a rural market there were the make-shift desks behind which sat the scribes who, unsuccessful in scholarship and pressed by poverty, offered literacy for sale at a low price, reading or writing a letter for a few cents.

Even if a peasant acquired elementary literacy, he was likely to forget most of it through disuse; there was no mechanical press, and the mass communication system such as the daily paper and periodicals and the traditional books were out of touch with the practical reality of peasant life. Popular story books were the only important category of written material that interested the peasant. These were important reading material in the leisure hours for literate peasants, and those who were able to read such materials enjoyed retelling the stories to neighbors and kinsmen, a practice we observed among the small knots of people gathered in the courtyards of the many ancestral halls in the evening hours. Popular stories and folklore which were essential for the operation of an agrarian folk society did not require universal literacy for their transmission. For this and other traditional literacy needs in the village community, a small percentage of literates in a population served adequately.

The only serious need for literacy on the part of the peasants was in the operation of groups larger than the family. Although ancestor worship in the peasant family operated by memory about the departed members, it functioned by written records, the genealogy, in the clan. The elders' council could pass on its own decisions verbally, but the orders and directives of the national government must be disseminated by written documents; and the national cultural tradition, including the complex moral precepts and philosophical doctrines, could be preserved over the centuries only through books. Hence the men who administered the clan and guided the national political structure and social order were literate products of formal institutional education. Since those who occupied such positions, especially in the operation of the national political and social order, possessed enviable prestige and privilege, literacy had become a symbol of identification of their class status; and the common peasants valued formal education not as a necessity for their simple personal life but solely as a channel of social advancement. The traditional status of formal education which we have just described had been subjected to new influences during the Republican period, when the general trend of readapting Chinese social institutions to the requirements of modern life was strongly oriented toward mass organization and technological development. Situated close to a major urban center, the emanating point of modern influences, Nanching had been affected to a certain degree.

The first major change had occurred in the formal institutional education. The philosophy and content of Confucian classical education was largely discarded as unsuitable for modern requirements of inculcating a different concept of social and political order and teaching a different kind of technical knowledge about the physical and human world. In contrast to the exclusive teaching of the Confucian social and political creed and Chinese history, the new schools added modern arithmetic, geography, and elementary ideas of modern science; they broadened history courses to include the whole world and instituted modern citizenship training—and all these subjects were to be covered in six grades.

By 1948 there remained in Nanching only mute evidence of the once dominant position of classical education. There were only the Chinese characters "Community School," executed in graceful calligraphy and carved into the stone arch above the doorway identifying the spacious and dignified building in the middle of the village as a former institution of classical learning. That building was now used as a storage place for public property such as ceremonial furniture, and some peasants used it for storing grain, for it had been over two decades since Lee Ying as the last teacher and his some two dozen pupils had vacated the structure. Confucian ideology still held a central place in the minds of the older villagers, but even they saw no future for Confucian learning for their children in a rapidly changing modern world. The entire process of educational transformation was symbolized in the dismantling of a stone memorial arch honoring a successful village scholar of the last century, the stones being used for paving a path leading to the new elementary school in 1936, and the unmindful young pupils hardly noticed that on their way to school they daily trampled over a stone piece bearing the still discernible carvings of the name of the honored scholar and his imposing imperial titles.

The new curriculum which was imposed by the Ministry of Education of the Nationalist government was developed by officials of urban intellectual background. Although it helped to broaden the peasants' mental outlook toward the world and to integrate village life with the emerging modern state, it woefully neglected the practical, intimate needs of local peasant life. Moreover, since it was a liberal education stressing knowledge of society and government on a broadened and modernized basis and in this respect resembled the traditional Confucian education, it appeared to the peasants as the kind of knowledge destined for membership of the ruling class, and they viewed the function of the new elementary school in this light. In other words, despite the changes in formal education in the Republican period, the peasants still regarded it as a channel for social and political advancement and not as a means for improving the community and the practical aspects of peasant life.

One feature of the modern changes in education which had made some inroad in Nanching was the national campaign for universal literacy, which originated with the urban intellectuals who wished to transplant modern Western society to China. Urban enthusiasm for universal literacy overflowed to the village communities in various parts of China in the late 1920's and early 1930's. In those years in Nanching students from a neighboring college and high school held several free evening classes for the villagers, attracting a fair attendance.

The process was interrupted by the war, but in 1948 students in the same college once again held free evening classes for the village, to which came about a hundred villagers, a large majority being between eight and twelve, some between twelve and sixteen, and the rest including about a dozen adults and two spirited old men in their sixties. Both sexes were represented, although boys predominated at a ratio of about two to one. It was impressive to witness the eagerness to learn among the adult students and the energy with which they urged on the younger ones. At the close of a hard working day, they would wash the field mud off their feet, eat a hurried supper and start off to the school in a long line, often with parents toting young children, both going to the same class. Literacy and education as a special privilege was nowhere demonstrated more vividly than in this scene. It was still the traditional value of education as a channel of social advancement and not as a new tool of everyday life that was the motivating force for such high enthusiasm.

To return, then, to the status of literacy in 1950, we could see that, although education had not yet taken on a practical functional value for Nanching peasants, the modern urban movement of universal education had scored some stable gains in the village. The 1950 figure of literacy, some 38 per cent of the village population, was probably two or three times higher than it had been a generation ago; and the fact that about 75 per cent of the literates were between the ages of ten to fifteen clearly represented a new development among the younger generation in recent years. In 1950 about 50 per cent of all school-age children (from eight to fifteen years old) attended the new elementary school, and villagers said that this was a much higher rate of school attendance than among the youngsters of the previous generation. The ratio between boys and girls in the village school was about four to one, which suggested an improvement over the traditional situation in light of the fact that almost all the adult women in the village were illiterate. In reviewing these developments, it should be borne in mind that Nanching was a suburban village close to a great city, and that such progress might not be typical of interior villages.

What was the initial impact of Communism on education in this village?

Although educational renovation was a major Communist objective, it appeared that in 1951 the Nanching elementary school still operated basically as before in terms of curriculum, although the ideological content in history, citizenship, and associated subjects was now reoriented according to the party line. However, confiscation of the school's income land for redistribution to the peasants caused serious financial difficulties. Additional levy had to be made on the village's land for school expenditures, and the staff was reduced from the original two teachers to only one in 1951. To this extent, there was a certain amount of deterioration of formal education in the village during the transitional period, although the Communist press reported substantial government support for schools in some villages in this locality, resulting in expanding teaching staff and increased scholarships.

One significant new phase of formal education introduced by the Communists to achieve rapid transition of Chinese society was the large number of short-term training courses set up for peasant leaders in various types of political and economic projects. Even in the early year of 1951, a few of the young activists in Nanching were taken to some of the training classes devoted mainly to indoctrination of the Communist ideology and instruction of organizational skills in setting up the new power structure. Since then, in the province of Kwangtung as in other parts of China, there had been established training courses for new agricultural techniques, for organizing mutual-aid teams, and for establishing agricultural producers' co-operatives, developments which would presumably involve the participation of many promising young peasants from the village.

More important in terms of the village as a whole, the movement for universal literacy received acceleration in Communist hands. Here the Communists were building on the foundations laid in the Republican period, and there was already public recognition of the importance of the movement. Workers in this field had already produced a number of simplified texts for teaching illiterate adults; and now the Communists conducted the movement as a sustained nation-wide drive on a well organized basis. From big cities to remote hamlets, literacy classes mushroomed through the national network of the Communist Party and popular organizations such as the Youth League and peasants' association. As early as 1950 the cadres in Nanching had started to organize "winter classes" through the peasants' association, the purpose being to use the relatively slack winter months for the peasants to learn to read and write; and evening classes were also organized. Although the peasants' association had to provide the books and other materials, a burden which the peasants were reluctant to assume, in the winter of 1950 about 20 per cent of the illiterate adult peasants attended such classes in Nanching.

The fundamental and revolutionary fact underlying the visible early changes in education and literacy in the village under Communism was the emergence of a practical function for education in the lives of the peasants. Looking ahead, the closer integration of village life into the broad national political and economic system was bound to compel the employment of the literacy medium as an indispensable means of communication; and as the peasant became involved in this integration movement, literacy would increasingly become a practical instrument of this life. At the local level of the new political system, since acquisition of literacy through short courses and other forms of special training was required of the activists and those elevated from among the poor peasants to share the new local political leadership with the Communists, literacy was now the operating tool for the new elite as it had been for the old gentry. Most sweeping in effect was the fact that even the common peasant was now subjected to a growing pressure to use literacy to get along in the new social and political order. Coming into the village in increasing quantities were government notices, directives, slogans, bulletins, propaganda, and educational materials in a variety of forms. Each of the many mass campaigns, from the subscription of bonds to land reform, was accompanied by the distribution of quantities of literature related to the subject. As such written materials concerned the intimate interest of everyone in the village, there was an increasingly compelling influence on the average peasant to become able to read such literature in order to know how to conduct himself in a social situation which had extended far beyond the range of personal contact and verbal communication in a small community. The mass literacy movement had indeed come to serve a new need for the common peasants.

The Reorientation of Recreation

The peasant, chained to the mechanical repetition of the organic cycle and to the unending demand of heavy physical exertion, traditionally relied on periodical recreation to combat fatigue and pessimism and to regenerate his interest and confidence in a life characterized by its meager material rewards. Anyone observing an agrarian community like Nanching in its varied recreational activities could sense in them the attempt to symbolize the intrinsic value of life as a balance against the hard and almost futile struggle for subsistence.

The most basic form of community recreation was the traditional system of festivals, based largely on the agricultural calendar and on the operation of the natural forces. The three to fifteen days of the Chinese New Year celebration, which led all traditional festivals in importance, fell at the most leisurely season of the farm routine. To insure its recreative function of releasing tension from worry and toil, there was a firm taboo against collecting debts during this period of jubilation. The Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth moon was related to the summer solstice, and its celebration provided a brief respite between the heavy spring planting chore and the coming summer farm work. Women's interests were taken care of by the Seventh Evening Festival on the seventh day of the seventh moon, when girls gazed at the Milky Way to watch for the imagined romantic meeting between two stars as a sign of their marital future. The time corresponded to the eve of the busy season when the women would be required to help gather the harvest and process the grain. The Moon Festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth moon was the celebration of the harvest, and it was the customary time to pay one's debts since everyone's purse was theoretically replenished at this time. The annual routine of work and burden was thus regularly punctuated with occasions of diversion and relief.

Everyone in the community took part in the festivals, the basic unit of celebration being the family; and in major festivals such as the New Year, the clan held a celebration in addition to the family celebration.

A festival celebration consisted of two central acts: the feast and the sacrifice to the gods of the occasion.

Since the most eager yearning among the majority of the peasants was for more food, one of the greatest enjoyments that life could bring was good food in abundance. Hence on festival days the family strained its purse to serve the best possible food: for the well-to-do the table was laden with delicacies; for the poor, some slivers of meat amidst the green vegetables and a sufficient quantity of staple items furnished welcome relief from the daily meager vegetable diet. Even their hard life seemed to be worth living as the members of the family sat down for the festival meal. On the other hand, the absence of a festival meal was the epitome of failure and misfortune and a cause for sadness and pessimism.

Besides giving relief from the toil and monotony of a hard life, the festival feast also was a symbol of providence. Hence the sacrifice to the gods by displaying the food in front of the family altar before consuming it. The almost insurmountable hardships in their struggle of life, the ever-threatening fear of failure and starvation, and the many sobering cases of misfortune in the community all impressed upon the peasants the limitations of human ability in achieving abundance, and suggested that in addition to man's industry and frugality, the gods' blessing was needed to avert misery and to attain success.

When the family gathered for the sacrifice and the feast, there was a reunion of its members which served to strengthen the solidarity of the family, and the major festivals traditionally required homecoming for emigrants if at all possible. This function was especially important for the solidarity of the clan, whose large membership reduced contact between individuals. When the clan gathered to offer sacrifice to the ancestors at a major festival such as at the New Year and later sat down together for the grand feast and to watch a community opera, the celebration provided an occasion for the periodic reconvening of the whole clan, demonstrating the concrete existence of the large group and renewing the kinship relations among the members in a joyous and optimistic atmosphere. The system of traditional festivals, with the major ones held once every one or two months throughout the year, thus served not only as an uplifting of the spirit among hard-working and hard-living peasants but also as a binding agent for the kinship-centered structure of the village community.

In addition to the community-wide periodic recreation, the traditional village life included small-group recreational activities. There were many different children's games which trained the young ones in the playing of social roles or prepared them for their future work through imitative acts. Among adolescents and adults, there were the familiar chess, checker, card, and tile games. There were the storytelling sessions either by a talkative fellow villager or by a professional storyteller. Going to the teahouse in small groups of from two to six men to talk and chat at noon was a favorite recreation for the financially better-off peasants. Among adolescents and adults all games were sex-segregated; and excepting the Lion's Club, which was devoted to physical culture, they did not stress physical exercise and there were almost no group contests.

Singing or playing a musical instrument like a bamboo flute was fairly common among the peasants; but playing the instruments together as an orchestra was uncommon among amateurs, and group singing was totally undeveloped in traditional life. Art and literature were an important form of recreation only for the very small minority of the educated and well-to-do.

We observed the traditional recreational life of the Nanching villagers continuing almost without change up to the time of the Communists' arrival in 1949. The only alteration in the system of festivals had been the dropping of the celebration of Confucius' birthday in the 1940's, marking the end of the long Confucian era in the village; and of all the new system of national holidays inaugurated during the Republican period only the Double Ten, celebrating the outbreak of the successful revolution on October 10, 1911, was marked at all – and that only by the holiday declared in the new elementary school.

In general, the Communist cadres did not forcibly interfere with the traditional recreational activities except in two cases. One was the disbanding of the Lion's Club as a political danger to the Communist power, and the other was discouraging the holding of celebrations for the birthdays of certain gods, a result of the Communist policy to "wipe out superstition." Although the celebration of the birthday of the God of Fire, an important festive occasion in Nanching, was discontinued in 1950, the village continued to celebrate the major traditional festivals such as the Chinese New Year, the Ch'ing Ming festival on the third day of the third moon designated for "sweeping the ancestral graves," the Dragon Boat Festival, and the Moon Festival.

But Communism created a new atmosphere. The richer families had all either fled or become impoverished through the land reform process; and they had been the households whose elaborate celebrations had created the sense of prosperity and abundance during festival occasions. They had been the heavy donors in financing community celebration programs such as an opera for major festivals. With their general disappearance from the scene went much of the gaiety of such occasions. The new public organizations having financial resources, such as the peasants' association, were under the direction of the cadres who would not devote money to such traditional undertakings.

So far as the common peasants were concerned, land reform had not brought sufficient economic improvement to enable them to afford much celebration. In fact, the rapid succession of political and economic crises affecting the intimate life of every individual and creating a sense of uncertainty and instability caused family celebrations of traditional festivals to become rather perfunctory; and clan celebrations were discontinued because of the confiscation of the clan income land. Even some of the financially better-off families refrained from putting on any elaborate celebration for fear of being classified as rich peasants, thereby inviting political reprisal.

The traditional forms of small-group and individual recreation met little forcible interference from the cadres, except the tile (mahjong) game, which was regarded as gambling. But many of these activities also were reduced by the impoverishment of the richer portion of the population. The three teahouses in Pingan Chen which had enjoyed long prosperity were now on the point of collapse. Customers were much fewer than before, and only cheap items were sold to meet the demand of those having a lower income level.

Regardless of possible economic improvement, it seemed doubtful even at that early period of Communist power that the traditional recreational life of the Nanching peasants would ever be fully restored. Recreation had now taken on a new and official meaning derived from the Marxist view that recreation belongs to the cultural superstructure founded on the needs of the forces of economic production; and the Communists were already systematically working to tie recreation directly to the requirements of building the socialist economic order.

Actors and actresses of old theatrical troupes were put through an indoctrination process to enable them to revise the old operas as vehicles for Communist political themes. Cadres from the Literary Work Corps and indoctrinated members of theatrical companies were organized into "rural opera troupes" and sent to the countryside to present the revised and new operas to the peasants, including those in the locality of which Nanching was a part. Under the direction of the cadres, the peasants' association in Nanching started an amateur theatrical troupe in 1951, presenting propaganda plays and operas to the villagers. Motion pictures were introduced into the countryside with regularity, and those shown in this locality included: "Conservancy of Water and Soil," "Eradicating Larvae of Insects," "Exercise and Health," "How to Raise Children," "Depth Plowing for Greater Production," "Wiping Out Flies," "Rural Sanitation," and "Short Courses on Literacy."

The novelty of the Communist entertainment attracted a good audience at first, but fatigue from the monotony of the political propaganda lines soon set in, and the utilitarian nature of the new recreational items nullified their entertainment value. They obviously did little to relieve the tension of the work routine; and there was a gradual decrease in attendance.

Besides the spectator type of entertainment, the Communists were vigorously introducing the participation type of organized group recreation. Western-style group games and, above all, group singing were conducted by the cadres, especially among the young peasants. Although the initial reception was not enthusiastic, members of the Youth League and the Young Pioneers were getting used to them, being especially attracted by the mixing of the sexes in the group games and singing. It was apparent that Communism had set in motion a new force which could be exploited to change the life of the community.

The Religious Aspect of Community Life

The traditional worship of the supernatural in the Chinese peasants' life arose from the need for confidence and strength in the face of humanly insurmountable circumstances in man's struggle with nature and his adjustment to the social order.* The predominance of direct struggle with the overpowering elemental forces in an agrarian community was embodied in the pantheistic system presided over by Heaven and staffed mainly by deities representing forces of nature. Heaven, with its sun, moon, stars, and the meteorological elements, was the symbol of the most powerful forces directly affecting the peasants' life. Next to Heaven were the many deities directly related to agriculture such as the God of Flood, the God of Dragon (controller of water and rain), the God of Earth and Grain, and the God of Oxen – all represented in the temples in Nanching and the surrounding villages. Because the kinship system was a basic unit in agricultural production and agrarian life, ancestor worship was developed to strengthen and perpetuate the system. Thus the worship of Heaven, agricultural deities, and ancestors became the basic religious system of the agrarian community because of their close relation to the economic foundation of peasant life.

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* A fuller study of the functions and structure of religion in Chinese society is the subject of my forthcoming work, *Religion in Chinese Society.*

The formal system was augmented by a host of supernatural beliefs. To the struggling peasant, success appeared to be not the achievement of man's efforts alone but the result of a combination of human endeavor and good fortune bestowed by the gods. Under such circumstances, there were countless occasions when man had to appeal to the supernatural as the limit of human resources was reached. Just outside the West Gate of Nanching stood the Temple of the God of Fire, and we were told by the priest there that the vast majority of the worshipers came to pray either for the return of health or for a son. When we interviewed some of the villagers who went to the temple to pray for the return of health, we found that most of them would have preferred a doctor had they been able to afford one. Unable to pay for medical attention, the cheapest alternative was to hope for favorable supernatural intervention through prayer to the appropriate god.

It is worth noting in this context that, although superstitions were numerous, they did not vitiate the peasants' realistic view of their struggle with the natural and social environment. There was strong traditional insistence upon the injunction: "Do the utmost within human power, but accept the ordinance of Heaven," and there was general social pressure against and popular contempt for those who did nothing but appeal to the spirits and gods for help.

In considering the social functions of religion in a peasant village like Nanching it is essential to do so in terms of its two structural types: institutional religion and diffused religion. In institutional religion the theology, the organization of the personnel, and the cultic symbols and practices are separate from the secular social institutions, thus making religion an independent social institution. In diffused religion these factors have no separate institutional existence but are diffused into the concept and structure of several different institutions. In Nanching, and in Chinese society as a whole, diffused religion represented the structurally stronger and more pervasive force in the lives of the common people.

The outstanding symbol of institutional religion in this village was the Temple of the God of Fire. This temple had an independent theology, Taoism; a separate organization, the lone Taoist priest; and its cultic symbols and practices all belonged to a system of religious life conducted outside the context of the secular social institutions. Besides the temple, the only other sign of institutional religion was the village seeress, who had a private altar in her home and a professionalized practice which was not a part of the secular institutions. The temple priest and the seeress together comprised a total personnel of two persons representing institutional religion in Nanching – less than 0.2 per cent of the village population. They operated independently, with only loose association with other priests in the vicinity; there was no hierarchical structure which might give them financial or organizational assistance, and under them was no organized congregation among the followers.

The situation in Nanching was thus characteristic of the polytheistic tradition, the worshipers had no permanent or exclusive connection with any single temple or priest, but visited temples or priests of different faiths as personal occasions demanded. Villagers worshiped in other temples in the surrounding villages and nearby towns in addition to the one in this village. With the priesthood so weak in terms of number, organization, and relation to the followers, it is apparent that such a system of institutional religion was in no position to offer resistance against Communist pressure. The only strong institutional religion in the vicinity of Nanching was the Christian church, and that had only about a half-dozen followers from the village.

In contrast was the position of diffused religion in Nanching. The most imposing religious structures in the village were the ancestral halls or temples. The theology of ancestor worship was an integral feature of the basic concept of the kinship system; its priesthood were the elders, who were members of the kinship organization; and its well integrated congregation was represented by the members of the family and the clan. It was an all-pervasive influence in the peasants' life.

Moreover, there were other peasant cults similarly diffused into various institutionalized aspects of the agrarian community life. At the center of the village stood a small altar of the God of Earth and Grain, one of the most universal deities in agricultural China, its theodicy being elaborately woven into the general concept of well-being of the agrarian community. There was no specialized priest connected with the cult. Villagers worshiped this god individually on private occasions, offering a variety of prayers concerning personal affairs; and on his birthday the community leaders officiated at the grand community celebration. Prior to the arrival of the Communists, there was a secular organization called the *sheh*, meaning the God of Earth (and Grain), which managed the garbage disposal of the entire village, thus diffusing the cult into one aspect of community organization under elected secular leadership. In surrounding villages the gods of many typically peasant cults such as the God of Dragon, which controlled water, were worshiped as patron deities for their respective community, the annual celebrations of their birthdays being organized by local secular leaders and serving to unite the agrarian community as a functioning group.

For at least a half-century before the coming of Communism to Nanching, the traditional system of religion in both its institutional and diffused forms had shown signs of progressive weakening owing to the spreading influence of modern science and materialism from the urban centers. In the Republican period the development of modern education yielded, among other things, a strong "anti-superstition" movement among the younger generation in the cities, and there was a distinct drift toward secularization in the general trend of social change in modern China. In the cities some of the major religious events which had formerly played an important part in community life were quietly discontinued because of lack of leadership and interest from the younger generation. The Yü Lan Chieh, once a most popular and colorful religious festival held for homeless spirits as recently as the early 1920's, passed into history in most localities. But such drastic changes had been mainly urban phenomena, and rural communities like Nanching, even though close to the big city, remained largely unaffected up to the time of the Communist victory.

The Communists, being not only a product of the urban secularization trend but also ardent supporters of the atheist tradition of Marxist materialism, set as an explicit objective the extension of the urban secularization trend to the countryside. The path of Communist advance was marked at the beginning by many smashed temples and sporadic antireligious violence, but as they moved to consolidate the social and political order of the newly conquered land their policy was to suppress only those organized religious activities which held a real or suspected political threat to them, and to take milder and gradual measures against general religious influences. In criticism against the young Communist officers for their harsh suppression of superstition among the peasants, Mao Tse-tung declared that one could not dig the superstitious ideas out of the peasants' mind but the peasants would automatically shed their superstitions when their material life became substantially improved and secure. To this extent, the Communists were sincere in their declared policy of permitting religious freedom, so long as it did not interfere with the Communist political program. This policy had a familiar traditional ring in the sense that the old imperial government rigidly suppressed organized religion that had any political significance but generally left alone nonpolitical religious worship and activities.

Most summarily affected by this Communist policy was Christianity, which was regarded as closely allied with Western political influence, and a series of purges were aimed at divorcing the Christian church from any foreign connections. Since there were only a few Christian converts in Nanching, the effect of such purges was relatively slight in the total picture of the community's religious life. Suppressive action against Western missionaries and many Chinese Christian leaders elsewhere in the vicinity began vigorously with the Korean War in 1950 and lasted until 1954. After that, many imprisoned Chinese ministers were released, and there was a gradual and limited restoration of Christian religious activities. But the disorganizing effect from the persecution of Christianity as an organized religion clearly remained.[1]

With regard to traditional institutional religion, the Temple of the God of Fire in Nanching remained unmolested, and villagers continued to pray there. But most of its ten mow of land was redistributed to the peasants, with a share retained for the priest who now had to farm the land for a living instead of relying on the rent, the meager donations from the worshipers being insufficient for his existence and maintenance of the temple. The seeress received a share of land from the land reform, and the Communist officers pressed her to give up the practice of superstition. It appeared that her open religious activities were greatly reduced. One officer charged that she was making a living by fraud when she practiced magic to heal illnesses, since as he pointed out, she patronized a medical doctor instead of relying on her own magic when she became sick, but the seeress was not put up for public trial or made to face any other forms of mob violence.

Ancestor worship was still carried on in the families, but the sacrificial ceremonies of the clan were curtailed because of the confiscation of the clan income land; and the celebration of religious festivals in honor of the gods was so consistently discouraged by the Communist authorities that after 1950 no community religious festivals were held in the village.

In general it could be said that the early impact of Communism on religion in Nanching probably pretty well typified official Communist policy. Without violence, but by the impoverishment of the rich families and the clans, religion was, so to speak, driven from public view back into the homes, where the unchangeable older generation of peasants could cherish their traditional customs and beliefs undisturbed. But the power of religion to strengthen community spirit and to evoke a sense of community sharing was already nearly destroyed. Most important of all, the Communists had embarked on a long-term program the effects of which could not yet be calculated but which was aimed at the eradication of traditional religious influence in Chinese life. At the heart of that program was the education of the younger generation. It was not on the compulsive remaking of the minds of those who were beyond the age of thirty that the Communists pinned their main hope for the final triumph of atheism, but on the youth who were now universally subjected to Communist education. The outcome of this vastly ambitious plan was a question for the future.

Ideology and Its Change

A social system, even in a relatively simple agrarian community like Nanching, needs an ideology to provide the structural principles and the operational values for the integration of the various institutional aspects of life and to develop functional consistency and unity in the variegated pattern of social action. It is beyond the scope of this study to render a full analysis of the complex problem of ideology in Nanching; but it is necessary to point out the salient features of the traditional ideological system and its recent change in order not to lose sight of the fact that ideological change was a vital aspect of the social transformation we are recording.

We have noted that Confucianism provided the traditional ideology that guided the functioning of the institutional framework of this community, and that the scholar-gentry traditionally acted as the custodians of the Confucian orthodoxy and served as its interpreters to the illiterate common people. Through centuries of conscious and unconscious effort, the basic features of that doctrine were intricately woven into every major aspect of the common people's life and became internalized values, a development aided by the adaptability of its social structural principles and its value system to the agrarian society dominated by the kinship organization and primary group existence, as evidenced by its emphasis on familial ties and on moral values most applicable to direct personal relations. We have also noted that in the Republican period Confucianism as an institutionalized orthodoxy lost irretrievable ground among the younger generation.

In 1948, the year before the Communists came, we made an attitude survey among the villagers in an attempt to discover their understanding of current ideologies. We asked the respondents to explain a list of terms concerning the basic principles of social organization and the social values of Confucianism, democracy, and Communism. For Confucianism we listed structural terms such as the Five Cardinal Relations (between emperor and subjects, father and son, elder and younger brothers, husband and wife, and friends), and value terms such as the Eight Virtues (filial piety, fraternal submission, loyalty, fidelity, propriety, righteousness, incorruptibility, and sense of shame). The structural terms for democracy included election, presidency of the Republic, and status of citizens, and the value terms included the freedoms of speech, assembly, and worship. The two sets of terms for Communism included dictatorship by the proletariat, democratic centralism, "exploitative life," and "supremacy of physical labor."

Analyzing the results, we found that villagers over forty years of age had a fairly complete comprehension of the Confucian terms; they were hazy about all democratic terms except that they knew there was no emperor in a Republic; and they were totally ignorant of the Communist terms. Among villagers between the ages of fifteen and forty, the generation which grew up under the Republic, there was moderate understanding of the Confucian values but a low degree of comprehension of the Confucian structural terms. Their understanding of the democratic terms was slightly better than that of the older generation, most of them having, for instance, a general idea of modern elections. But they were as ignorant of Communism as the older generation. The age-old absolute dominance of a single ideology, Confucianism, was broken. The predominance of Confucianism in the minds of the older generation was in conflict with the realism of an emerging democratic social and political order under the Republic which exerted increasing influence on the life of the village. There was apparent ideological chaos in the minds of the younger generation. Both their understanding and their acceptance of the Confucian orthodoxy had been much weakened, but they had no sound knowledge or visible interest in democratic ideas which were supposed to be the orthodoxy of the Republic. Most of the younger generation, for instance, equated the president with the emperor.

These facts had significant implications. The lack of a consistent system of well-understood and well-accepted ideology implied progressive social disorganization. It suggested that what helped maintain the social order of the community was the dominance of the ideologically consistent older generation in the operation of the major social institutions in the village life. But this local condition was in contrast to the growing dominance of the younger generation in strategic political, economic, and social positions in the rapidly modernizing urban world, and it was doubtful that it could be sustained. Lastly, it was evident that, up to 1948, Communist ideology had been suddenly superimposed upon the village from the outside with no gradual process of incipient introduction among the villagers young or old. This was the ideological situation which confronted the Communists when they came to Nanching in 1949.

Communist strategy in the transition period was to concentrate intensive indoctrination upon the elite, both old and new. This meant ideological remolding of the former leadership portion of the population in pre-Communist society and intensive indoctrination for the young activists marked for leading the new social order.

We have mentioned the arrest of Lee Feng, the middle-aged leader in pre-Communist village affairs. During his months of detention in the labor re-education camp, he had to attend ideological lectures and discussions every morning, and the afternoons were devoted to physical labor in repairing a highway in the vicinity of Canton, a procedure designed to acquaint political prisoners with the importance and hardship of production labor and to purge thoughts of exploitation from their minds. The silence of subdued Lee Feng after his release from the labor camp clearly indicated covert hatred for his new masters instead of any genuine ideological transformation.

The two teachers in the village elementary school had to attend indoctrination classes in Pingan Chen along with teachers from other village schools in the vicinity. The classes were held in the evening during the summer months of 1950. The teachers' indoctrination, aimed ultimately at molding the thoughts of the young generation, showed signs of considerable success. If the adult villagers were still quite ignorant of and distinterested in Communism, pupils from the elementary schools in 1951 were already enthusiastically singing Communist songs and parroting Communist slogans, and many of them acted as informants for the Communists on affairs of the village and even of their own families.

Indoctrination sessions and general propaganda carried on within the new organizations such as the peasants' association and the Youth League were already producing a crop of young leaders who could follow the Communist directives with at least superficial understanding of the new terminology. Nanching provided visible evidence that the generation under twenty years of age were most receptive to ideological remolding.

The remolding of the thoughts of the common peasants was left largely to the general propaganda process; and group pressure, psychological suggestions, and coercive threats from propaganda movements undoubtedly served to impress upon their minds some of the basic themes of the Communist ideology. But the degree of acceptance of such themes by the hard-headed peasants depended largely upon actual benefits they derived from the new social and economic order. If the young activists showed considerable genuine conviction in the new ideological line, it was partly due to the concrete benefits they reaped from the change, including prestige and material gain from being elevated to the new status of leadership. But the common peasants generally did not share these benefits, and they were still pressed by the problem of eking out a bare subsistence for themselves and their families.

It was our observation, then, that the early impact of Communism on the ideology of the great majority of the Nanching peasants left them apathetic, skeptical, and submissive rather than showing any genuine enthusiasm and conviction toward Communism. The destruction of the Confucian orthodoxy created, especially for the older generation, an ideological vacuum, a situation which had significance for the development of the new social and political order.

PART III

National Changes in the Village Community under Collectivization

Chapter XV

From Mutual-Aid Teams to Full Collectivization

LAND REFORM was one of the most momentous events in the history of China. When the entire process had been concluded for the nation as a whole, some 700 million mow of land (about 43 per cent of all cultivated land) had been distributed to 300 million landless or land-short peasants (approximately 60 per cent of the peasant population).[1] But this was only the first step in the Communist program of trying to raise China's agricultural productivity and drastically remaking the agrarian economy. Beyond land reform lay the even more momentous and drastic event of agricultural collectivization, which, since it uprooted the institutions of private ownership of land and the family farm, had the most intimate effect on the life of almost the entire agrarian population.

Since our field observations of Nanching ended with the land-reform stage, the collectivization process as it occurred in this particular village lay beyond the range of our investigation. Nevertheless, with collectivization now nationally realized, it is necessary to give some thought to this aspect of transformation of the rural community so as to keep the study of Nanching in realistic perspective. If our field data on Nanching serve as a microcosmic reflection of the macrocosm, the macrocosmic picture of the nation and the region may similarly show the general nature of the political and economic force to which the village was subjected. Hence the subsequent chapters present a brief analysis of the national collectivization movement as a generalized account. Whenever available, we employ regional data from Kwantung Province and local data from districts around the city of Canton to bring the picture close to the village of Nanching. Meanwhile, our acquaintance with the pre-collectivized conditions of this village aids our interpretation of the general collectivization process.

Land reform performed the vital functions of removing the most uncompromising opposition to socialism from rural power groups and enlisting the support of one part of the agrarian population. However, since it retained the small family farm economy, with all its political and economic limitations, land reform by itself could not substantially raise agricultural productivity and usher in the socialistic rural economy envisaged in Communist ideology, and the reorganization of the family farm along the collectivist line became an inevitable development.

In our observation of Nanching, we have noted the excessively small scale of the farm unit, the wide scattering of its plots, and the limited manpower and financial resources of the microscopic family farm. This small-farm economy, which was common to the vast majority of China's village communities and had long posed the basic problem for any effort to modernize Chinese agriculture, stood as the chief obstacle to the Communist socialization program, which was based on the Leninist theory that the only way to lift the peasantry out of its age-old economic plight was to transform the farm into an agricultural factory where modern principles of division of labor and mechanical techniques could be applied. Moreover, since the small-farm economy was the result of a complexity of traditional practices rooted in the system of property ownership and family economy and deeply connected with the vested interests of the land-owning peasants, it was obvious that any sudden enlargement of the farm unit through reconsolidation would be a tremendous shock to the peasants and cause at least a transitional chaos in the agrarian economy. The Communists therefore devised a three-stage national agricultural program intended to make the collectivization process a gradual one that would be acceptable to the peasants.

The first step was to be the organization of mutual-aid teams in order to bring the peasants out of their family farm as a working unit. The mutual-aid team would begin as a seasonal organization and later be transformed into a year-round team after the working arrangement had become stabilized. The second step was to be the consolidation of groups of successful year-round teams into a lower or elementary agricultural producers' co-operative in which the land would be pooled and farmed as a collective unit, but with each member retaining the ownership of his land and being remunerated partly according to his labor and partly according to his proportionate share of that part of the yield set aside for the recognition of land ownership. Members would also transfer to collective ownership their heavy farm equipment and draft animals, and receive appropriate compensation from the co-operative. The third and final stage was to be the transformation of this organization into a higher or advanced agricultural producers' co-operative, in which private ownership of land would be abolished and a member's reward would be measured only by the quality and quantity of his labor. In all major organizational aspects, the advanced type of co-operatives would be full-fledged collective farms like those in the Soviet Union, the two differing only in name, as officially interpreted by the Communist authorities.[2] An additional form of agricultural collectivism would be the large state farms to be set up in different regions partly to demonstrate how large farm units should operate.

There were some traditional roots for mutual-aid teams. It has been mentioned previously that the poor and middle peasants in Nanching often exchanged labor among themselves because of their inability to afford hired help at peak seasons, a practice also common in other parts of China.[3] Such traditional mutual aid normally involved only two families and lasted only for the duration of the task requiring such mutual help; and in Nanching kinship tie was usually a factor in such arrangements. The Communist-designed seasonal mutual-aid team was generally made up of a half dozen to about twenty peasant families whose labor, tools, and farm animals were pooled to work on the land belonging to the member families. It might disband when the farming season was over. When it continued in operation the whole year round, doing not only farm work but also collective supplementary activities such as handicraft or fishing in the streams during slack seasons, it became a year-round team.

In the Northeast and North China, where the Communists took hold earlier than in the South, land reform had a head start, and over 70 per cent of all the peasant families were said to belong to mutual-aid teams by 1952, with about 20 per cent of the teams reported as the year-round type.[4] In Kwangtung Province, where Nanching is located, since land reform was not generally completed until the end of 1952, the organization of mutual-aid teams came later. Even for the suburban area of Canton, where land reform took place relatively early, the organizing campaign for mutual-aid teams did not become an extensive movement until early 1953.

Immediately before the spring planting of 1953, the Agricultural Bureau for the Canton Suburban Area, an agency under the Canton Municipal Government, issued a call for the rural cadres to intensify their efforts in organizing mutual-aid teams and agricultural producers' co-operatives. The Bureau conducted a short course to train peasant leaders in the organization and operation of mutual-aid teams before the spring planting of 1953, hoping to develop a large number of seasonal teams for the spring planting, and to gradually transform them into permanent teams at a later date.[5] By the time spring planting was completed, it was reported that 247 mutual-aid teams had been established in the northern and western suburban areas.[6] In one village near Nanching, 90 per cent of the peasant families were said to have joined mutual-aid teams. One team leader in that village described his team:

> Our team comprises seven families, all poor peasants and former farm laborers. We faced a shortage of labor during busy seasons, and we were too poor to afford hired help. We were also short of farm tools and too poor to buy fertilizer. In the past, we were not able to finish our farm chores in the proper time, and it was hopeless to think of increasing production.
>
> But we organized our mutual-aid team in the fall of last year [1952]. We pooled our labor and farm tools for systematic use and thus overcame the shortage of labor and tools. We also mobilized every family to collect and accumulate fertilizer, and solved our fertilizer problem. The autumn crop was a bumper crop, and we had surplus grain to buy tools and fertilizer . . . Our objective for this year is to produce 1,300 catties of unhusked rice per mow, representing more than 20 per cent increase over the yield of last year. We also plan to develop auxiliary industries such as raising pigs and poultry, and to reclaim some waste land to increase our crop area . . .[7]

In another neighboring village several mutual-aid teams were organized just before the spring planting of 1953. One team was composed of eight families, with 45 mow (7.5 acres) of land altogether, and four water buffaloes. It pooled all its labor, tools, and animals, and claimed to have completed plowing and planting in a shorter time than was formerly required. It took eight days to transplant the rice seedlings for all of the 45 mow, whereas it would have taken about fifteen days to plant the same area if the families had worked independently.[8]

Although such Communist reports did not offer conclusive evidence concerning the over-all superiority of the mutual-aid team as a production organization over the traditional family farm, they provide some facts for analysis of the economic advantages or disadvantages of the mutual-aid team.

There was apparently a real advantage in the mutual-aid pooling of farm tools and equipment. This applied especially to the poor and lower-middle peasants who were hindered by a shortage of such items. Since different families might possess different tools, pooling them was a practical way to at least temporarily overcome the shortage. In addition, equipment such as the winnowers were in use only for a short time for each farming season. In the past, peasants in Nanching usually borrowed such equipment from more prosperous kin or friends and at times paid a small rental in cash, grain, or labor. There was therefore apparent economic value in the joint use of such items by a mutual-aid team through pooling tools and equipment. Theoretically, there was a similar advantage in the mutual-aid teams' joint use of draft animals such as the water buffalo. But when a buffalo was transferred to a team, it was often overworked, under-fed, and poorly cared for, as attested to by the high mortality rate among draft animals belonging to mutual-aid teams. This difficulty of poor collective care and high mortality rate remained a problem under the agricultural producers' co-operatives of both the lower and higher forms, posing a serious difficulty in the development of collectivism in agricultural production.

The problem of labor efficiency under the mutual-aid organization was more complex and the picture is less clear. Working in collectivity, the mutual-aid team seemed able to alleviate to a certain extent the shortage of labor during peak seasons which had handicapped the poor and lower-middle peasants who had been unable to afford much hired help. Published reports from different parts of the country were fairly consistent in showing that well-organized teams were able to complete their work faster than if the families had worked independently. In the traditional practice of exchanging labor there was the uncertainty of finding someone to exchange labor with, and the exchange arrangement was limited to one task at a time. The mutual-aid team, if successfully organized and operated, stabilized the labor-exchange relationship among a group of families and put it on a comprehensive basis to include not only one task at a time but all tasks involved in the production of a crop or in auxiliary industries.

Related to labor efficiency was the complicated problem of remuneration according to quantity and quality of labor. Although Communist authorities issued general guiding principles for classifying skilled and unskilled labor and the proper ways of remuneration, each local team had to work out its own detailed rules, with the resulting difficulty of producing an arrangement pleasing to every participating family. For most types of farm work, remuneration was based on the labor unit, representing one man performing an average day of labor, with little differentiation between skilled and unskilled labor. The labor-unit system also frequently failed to distinguish the industrious from the lazy within the same class of work, thus causing dissatisfaction and conflict among members. This was often the reason for which the efficient middle peasants refrained from joining mutual-aid teams or withdrew from them, as indicated in many Communist press reports. In addition, the Chinese had traditionally relied upon family and friendship relations in carrying out economic activities. It would take considerable readjustment of this traditional pattern to new economic relations on a business basis such as required in the operation of a well-adjusted mutual-aid team. It is doubtful whether such readjustment was successfully made in a majority of the teams.

Whatever the merits and failings of the mutual-aid team, it was set up as the initial organization for increasing direct state planning and control of agricultural production. Its basic function of effecting the transfer of agriculture from private operation to an economy under state planning and control was made clear in the following excerpts from a directive issued by the Suburban Agricultural Bureau of the Canton Municipal Government in 1953, which was typical of similar directives issued in the same period:

> The government's production plan for the suburban area this year lays main emphasis upon the production of food and the increase of its productivity. The goal is 810 catties of unhusked rice per mow, an increase of 12.3 per cent over last year. The suburban villages are now busy completing preparations for spring planting, such as the examination and repair of water control works, the killing of pests, the collection of fertilizer, and the development and consolidation of mutual-aid organizations. Besides, the villages are actively initiating the patriotic bountiful production emulation campaign, getting an early start on spring planting so as to complete spring farming according to schedule.
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> . . . The earth work for the Pachow dike, Yunkuei dike and Tangchi dike must be completed by the end of March, and the dams and culverts must be completed by April 10 of this year [1953]. Besides, the local district organization must add thickness and height to existing dikes as needed. Where droughts are frequent, more reservoirs must be deepened by one to two feet, with the goal of supplying water for irrigation for thirty rainless days . . .
>
> The peasants must be mobilized to collect more fertilizer, with the goal of applying 20 per cent more fertilizer to each mow over that of last year . . . Pest control committees must be established in the subdistricts and villages . . .

> . . . In all subdistricts, the patriotic bountiful production emulation campaign must be developed among the masses. At least 75 per cent of the year-round mutual-aid teams must join this campaign, but special effort must be made to induce the independent peasants (who have not joined any mutual-aid team) to participate in the emulation and to lead them toward the organization of mutual-aid teams and co-operatives. Regulations of rewards should be worked out for this year's emulation campaign. Stories of model laborers in the bountiful production emulation campaign should be introduced to the people, and the experience of the model laborers should be popularized so as to break through the peasants' conservatism and awaken them to participate in the emulation voluntarily.
>
> For this year's spring planting, all subdistricts have held peasants' representatives conferences which have developed production plans for the year and concrete measures to carry out production for the spring crop, including the development of the production emulation campaign. Each of these conferences has also issued calls for the peasants to carry out intensive farming and to start early on their spring crop.[9]

Such directives pointed to drastic change, indeed. In planning his farming operation, the individual peasant traditionally followed his own considerations of land, water, capital investment, and methods of cultivation; and the amount of labor to be exerted was determined by the age and health of the peasant and his family members, his economic needs, moral pressure and discipline from his kinship group and the village community, his own ambition, and encouragement from the chance of success which varied generally in proportion to the peasant's economic status. The plan and goal of production was a matter for the individual peasant family to decide. Now the state was to impose a uniform target of production: 810 catties per mow, or an increase of 12.3 per cent over the pre-Communist level. In the past, a peasant would start preparing his field for spring planting by consulting the old almanac, looking at the weather, and following the lead of experienced neighbors. Now cadres held meetings in front of the ancestral temple to exhort them to start spring planting early. Posters on the walls carried the same injunction. In some villages, peasants' association leaders even beat a pair of brass gongs through the streets, shouting the same slogans. In the past, gongs were used to warn villages of approaching danger or to call them to emergency meetings. Now the routine matter of starting the spring crop was elevated to the emergency level.

It was clear that such changes, violating all traditional practice, could not be successfully carried out among a conservative peasantry by relying on the sporadic spontaneous response from individual peasants. Hence the importance of the mutual-aid team as an instrument for obtaining guided collective response to government calls and for getting individual peasants into line with the directives.

One of the major techniques used to raise agricultural production was the production emulation campaign to stimulate greater labor exertion. Although Communist propaganda encouraged independent peasants to join in such emulation, it was apparent that the main burden of the campaigns rested on the collective participation of the mutual-aid teams, with one team setting up a quota of production per mow as a challenge to other teams. In some villages near Nanching such group emulation seemed to have raised production enthusiasm, and there were Communist press reports of increased production of as much as 20 per cent per mow over the level of the previous year. But also commonly reported in the Communist press were cases of falsification of accomplishment, at times involving the Communist cadres responsible for the direction of the emulating teams, an indication of the difficulty in arousing genuine enthusiasm among conservative peasants for new activities unintelligible to them. Although there was no systematic official report on the general success or failure of planned targets in the suburban area as a whole, we might note in passing that in pre-Communist Nanching a 12 per cent increase in yield of rice was often achieved by some peasants through adequate application of fertilizer and water without altering the form of farm organization.

Mutual-aid teams were instrumental in the selection of "model laborers" in agricultural production, individuals who were propagandized as local heroes for their personal achievements at farm work. The "model laborer" rose as a new figure on the Communist social scene, signifying a new glorified role for the manual laborer which was in dramatic contrast to the traditional emphasis on the prestige of the brain-worker and the scholar and the low esteem for manual achievement. The mutual-aid teams were similarly instrumental in the technical aspects of increasing agricultural production. It was mainly through the organized action of the teams that the Communist leaders spurred the peasants to collect more fertilizer, improve water control and irrigation works, and adopt new methods of cultivation such as using better strains and close-planting of rice seedlings.

In attempting a general evaluation of the mutual-aid teams, one would say that their most significant accomplishments were the pooling of tools and labor and the collective attempt to stimulate enthusiasm for increased production. Since they had no permanent common property assets, their ability to undertake technical improvements was limited to those requiring collective labor but little or no capital investment, such as certain types of hydraulic projects and adoption of the close-planting method. How far the mutual-aid teams in the period 1952–1955 fulfilled hopes in helping to raise agricultural production and ease the transition toward full collectivism is a question to which Communist reports offered no conclusive answer. It might be inferred from the sudden acceleration of the collectivization program after 1955, a move which indicated a decisive change in official policy, that the mutual-aid teams had failed to come up to the expectations of the Communist planners.

At any rate, after 1955 the Communist regime undertook to speed up the transition toward full collectivism almost to the point of discarding the original program of gradual transformation by stages.

The slow growth in the number of co-operatives of both the lower and the higher types during the first years of the agricultural program had been consciously designed to allow the mutual-aid teams to become stabilized organizations so as to provide a firm foundation for full collectivization. For the whole country, there were only 300 agricultural producers' co-operatives of both types in 1951, 4,000 in 1952, and 14,000 in 1953, the year when the mutual-aid teams first emerged as an established nation-wide movement. The rise in the number of co-operatives to 650,000 by the end of June in 1954, with a membership of 16,900,000 farm households or about 15 per cent of the nation's total, was impressive, but after 1955 was practically explosive. Chou En-lai, the Communist premier, reported: "By the end of June 1956 a total of 992,000 agricultural producers' co-operatives have been organized throughout the country. Their members make up 91.7 per cent of the country's peasant households; those joining co-operatives of the higher type constitute 62.6 per cent of all peasant households.[10] This significant development led Liao Lu-yen, Minister of Agriculture, to declare that "the small peasant economy has been transformed throughout the country." [11] By the spring of 1957, although consolidation of smaller units reduced the total to 752,113 co-operatives, with 93.3 per cent of all farm households in the nation belonging to the higher type and only 3.7 per cent belonging to the lower type, these co-operatives comprised 118,908,965 peasant households or 97 per cent of the nation's total.[12] In harmony with this national trend, the Communist leadership in Kwangtung Province hastened to achieve "complete cooperativization" in 1956.[13]

Thus almost complete national collectivization was effected mainly in the three-year period of 1955–1957, especially the year 1956. In view of the magnitude of the peasant population involved, it is highly doubtful whether such rapid development could have followed the original policy of gradual transition through the seasonal mutual-aid team, the year-round mutual-aid team, and lower type, and finally the higher type of agricultural producers' co-operatives.

A vital turning point in the acceleration of collectivization was Mao's announcement to the Communist Party leadership in July 1955 of the decision to speed up the collectivization process. When the secret decision finally appeared in the Communist press some three months later, it revealed a goal of collectivizing one-half of the 120,000,000 farm households in China by 1958 and complete collectivization by 1960.[14] As shown in the above figures, the speed of actual development exceeded that in Mao's decision.

Mao's policy of sudden acceleration was based both on the Communist unshaken belief in collectivism as the ultimate means of raising agricultural production and on the pressing need to resolve the growing number of problems besetting the current situation of drastic social and economic transition.

It was admitted at last that equalization of land ownership through land reform alone had not greatly improved the situation of mass poverty caused in a large measure by excessive population pressure on the land. Mao said:

> China's situation is this: there is a large population with insufficient cultivated land (a per capita average of three mow for the nation, and one mow or fractions of one mow in many places in the South). Natural calamities and famine occur frequently, and there are backward methods of farm management. As a result, although land reform has brought certain improvements or great improvements to the life of the broad peasantry, many people still face difficulties, still are not well-off. Well-off peasants constitute only a minority. Hence the majority of the peasants have the positive tendency to pursue the course of socialism.[15]

Elaborating on this statement, Mao pointed out that in the post–land reform period "60 to 70 per cent of the peasants are still poverty stricken or not well-off, and only 20 to 30 per cent are well-off or relatively so."

Moreover, there was a "spontaneous regeneration of capitalism" in the post–land reform countryside. Said Mao:

> In the past few years, there has been a tendency for capitalistic influences to grow in the countryside. Many peasants have become rich. On the other hand, we see the aggravation from the conditions of poverty of many peasants who are compelled to sell their land and to hire out their own labor. If such conditions are given no immediate improvement, the poor peasants will complain to us, and criticize us for not providing any help.

> . . . To attain the ideal goal of agricultural reform, there is the need for speedy promotion of the cooperative organization.[16]

In addition to these urgent economic and political problems stemming directly from conditions in the countryside, the pressing needs of the industrialization program for increased agricultural production played an important part in the acceleration of collectivization. There was the need for feeding a growing urban population which had increased from 71,000,000 in 1952 to 92,000,000 in 1957, a gain of 29.6 per cent.[17] There was the need to provide food for peasants in an expanding area devoted to industrial crops such as cotton. Agricultural products were the main exports available to exchange for foreign machinery and capital goods for the five-year plans. And there were the yearning mouths from the annual increment of 12,000,000 new population now growing at the rate of 2 per cent a year. Lu Chih-heng, a Communist writer, concluded from this situation:

> The growth of small peasant farming could not catch up with the growth of consumption, and this contradiction could be traced to the productive relations of small private ownership which could not provide a broad field for development of the productive forces. Although after liberation small private ownership replaced feudal ownership, making it possible to restore and develop agricultural production, the insurmountable limitation of small peasant economy made it impossible to increase agricultural production to a considerable extent or to free itself completely from backwardness and poverty. Further, it shows the contradiction between small peasant economy and socialist industrialization. Small peasant economy could not meet the rapid growth of demand for marketable grain arising from the development of industry. When the peasants keep more grain for self-consumption, marketable grain is reduced with its effect produced on the supply of marketable grain. This is a serious problem which, if not solved, will cause tremendous difficulty to socialist construction and socialist transformation.[18]

This statement, typical of others made by Communist leaders including Mao Tse-tung, clearly implied that collectivization would serve not only to raise agricultural productivity but also to facilitate the extraction of agricultural products from the peasants in order to meet growing needs. Whereas with private ownership the government would have great difficulty in buying products from the peasants at a price low enough to enable the government to finance an extensive industrial program without incurring inflation, political control of the co-operatives would make it possible to insure delivery of agricultural products to the government at low prices; and, while it would be almost impossible to exert direct control over some 120,000,000 peasant farms, it would be feasible to do so with about three-quarters of a million co-operatives.

It is not difficult to see that the Communist motives for speeding up collectivization in agriculture reflected conditions as we knew them in the village of Nanching.

CHAPTER XVI

Economic Problems of the Agricultural Producers' Co-operatives

Productive Function

ACCEPTING THE Communist claim that by 1957 collectivization had been achieved in some form in the entire country, the question arises as to the stability and soundness of the innumerable hastily organized co-operatives. Enjoying no support whatever from institutionalized traditions, the co-operatives were created by law on the theory that they could increase agricultural production and income; and only successful performance of this primary function could justify their coming into existence. Mao Tse-tung stated that it would serve no purpose to organize co-operatives if they did not result in increased production from the land and more income for the peasants,[1] and the Communist Ministry of Agriculture issued elaborate guiding principles for increasing production among the co-operatives and improving income for 90 per cent of the members.[2] A first question, then, is whether the co-operatives actually increased production.

Generally speaking, the Communist reports offered three categories of information to vindicate the superiority of the co-operatives as a productive organization: increase of national agricultural production, increase of production per unit of land area, and samples of individual co-operatives having increased production. In using Communist information, one is confronted with a mass of statistics often lacking in consistency and giving little opportunity for verification or checking of errors. The total food grains output for 1956, for example, was variously stated as 365 and 385.5 billion catties in different sources. In the absence of reliable means of verification, we have used the latest figures on the presumption that the required information had been made increasingly available to the Communist government.

One set of figures compared national agricultural production under Communist leadership with that in the 1930's before the Japanese invasion, when Chinese farm production was at a prewar peak, in order to demonstrate the over-all superiority of the Communist system over the small family farm economy at a period of its best performance. The data presented in the accompanying tabulation are from "The Policy of Unified Purchase and Sale of Grain Shall Not Be Frustrated," by Chou Po-ping, in *Liang Shih* (Grain), no. 7, July 1957. It should be noted that one ton equals 1,814 catties or 18.14 tan, the tan being the equivalent of 100 catties.

	1932–1936	*1952–1956*	*Change in percentage*
Food grains (in billion catties)	1,300	1,658	+ 9.0
Cotton (in million tan)	60.5	103	+ 54.0

Another group of figures presented a continuous annual growth of national production of major agricultural products from the Communist assumption of power in 1949 to 1957, in order to prove specifically the correctness and effectiveness of the collectivistic program. The following table is a sample showing the total annual production of food grains (including potatoes) which represented the backbone of China's agricultural production. The figures from 1950 through 1957 are from "Outlines of Propaganda on the Policy of Unified Purchase and Unified Sale of Grain," by the Editorial Department of *Shih Shih Shou Ts'e* (Current Events), no. 17, September 6, 1957. The figure for 1949 is from "Is the People's Life Not Bettered?" by Ching Chi, in the same publication, no. 15, August 6, 1957.

Year	*Food grains (billion catties)*	*Annual increase (billion catties)*	*Annual increase (per cent)*
1949	216.0	—	—
1950	264.3	48.3	22.3
1951	287.4	23.1	8.7
1952	327.8	40.4	14.0
1953	333.7	5.9	1.8
1954	339.0	5.3	1.6
1955	367.9	28.9	8.5
1956	385.5	17.6	4.8
1957	402.7 (estimate)	17.2	4.5

While the total national output of agricultural production was the result of a combination of many factors of which collectivization was but one, the second category of information on the output per unit area (mow) reflected more specifically the performance of the collectivist system. In this respect, available information was given not in the form of concrete figures on a year-to-year basis, but in percentage comparison between two years, each representing a different situation. An example was the percentage increase of production per unit area in 1956, when collectivization became a national fact, as compared with 1949, when the Communists first came into power. Thus, with 1949 as 100, the 1956 production of rice was 131, wheat 142, miscellaneous grain 134, potatoes 142, and the average for these food crops was 138.[3] In other words, 1956 as the year of national collectivization showed an increase in per unit area output ranging from 31 per cent for rice to 42 per cent for potatoes. A range of increase from 28 to 43 per cent was registered for the industrial crops of cotton, jute and hemp, tobacco, sugar cane, and peanuts; and only sweet beet and rapeseeds showed a slight decrease per unit area.

The third category of information contained a large number of cases of individual co-operatives showing for the most part an increase in productivity as further support for the general theme that collectivization had brought an increase in national agricultural production and in the national average of production per unit area. Such information covered the early 1950's, when co-operatives began to appear sporadically in different parts of the country, to 1957, when national collectivization was considered achieved. Thus a co-operative in the northern part of Shansi Province reported in 1951 an increase of 32.7 per cent per mow of wheat compared to 1950, when the co-operative was not yet organized.[4] A co-operative in the southern part of Chekiang Province claimed a 25 per cent increase of yield of rice per mow in 1953,[5] and another in Chieh-yang county of Kwangtung Province reported an increase of 33 per cent per mow of rice in the same year,[6] as compared with 1952 before the co-operatives came into existence in either locality. In Linfen county of Shansi Province the "model" Red Star Co-operative reported in 1957 a yield of 332 catties of wheat per mow on the average, showing an increase of 42 catties or 14.5 per cent over 1956.[7] All co-operatives in Lungki county of Fukien Province averaged 470 catties of rice per mow for the early crop in 1957, making a 6 per cent increase over that in 1956.[8]

As in the case of national figures, there is no means of checking the accuracy of these and other local figures. In the case of the average figure for the co-operatives in Lungki county of Fukien Province, however, the locality is within 250 miles of Nanching, and because of regional proximity and environmental similarity, the experience of Nanching may serve as a measurement. In pre-Communist Nanching certain above-average farms did yield 450 catties of rice per mow a crop in a traditional double-crop system. Given certain organizational and technical improvements, the reported 470 catties of yield per mow appears feasible. No evaluation of accuracy can be rendered for the other figures quoted.

Communist sources occasionally admitted decreased production with poorly organized co-operatives, without giving factual details. For instance, in the midst of the "great debate" on socialism in 1957 the *Nanfang Jih-pao* in Canton printed on September 14 a generalized statement from many Communist leaders assigned to co-operatives in Kwangtung Province: "In my co-operative, production has actually decreased, and the members have many opinions. How can I talk about the superiority of co-operativization?" This and other similiar statements printed in Communist sources pointed out the obvious, namely, the presence of co-operatives having decreased production along with those showing increased production. Despite the Communist claim that the vast majority of all co-operatives in the country had raised their production in 1957 over the previous year, so long as the claim was a vague one unsupported by convincing statistics and relevant factual information, the question remained as to the proportion of such co-operatives among the nation's 750,000 co-operatives.

A common Communist argument for the over-all success of the nation's co-operatives in raising production was the steady annual increase in national agricultural output since 1949, despite losses from serious natural calamities in some years. Without the increase in productivity by the co-operatives as a counterbalancing factor, so went the argument, the years of serious natural calamities would have shown a decrease instead of an increase in national farm output. Thus damages from typhoons, floods, and droughts in 1956 were considered the most serious in recent decades, but national output in food grains forged ahead 4.8 per cent over that in 1955. This argument was not borne out by an examination of the damage figures resulting from natural calamities as made public by the Communists; these figures appear in the accompanying tabulation and are computed from "The Policy of Unified Purchase and Sale of Grain Shall Not Be Frustrated," by Chou Po-ping, *Liang Shih* (Grain), no. 7, July 1957.

It is obvious that even in 1956, when damage from natural calamities was the greatest in the years listed, the actual loss in output amounted to only 0.063 per cent of the nation's total, an amount too negligible to

Year	*Loss in output of food grains (million catties)*	*Total national output of food grains (billion catties)*	*Percentage of loss to national output*
1953	150	333.7	.045
1954	177	339.0	.052
1955	127	367.9	.035
1956	244	385.5	.063

affect substantially the annual increase or decrease in national output. On the other hand, 1953 suffered the least damage in absolute figures, and yet that year's national output of food grains had an annual gain of only 1.8 per cent, among the lowest since 1949. It is thus evident that neither losses from natural calamities nor collectivization can entirely explain the annual fluctuations in national grain output since 1949 unless the statistical figures, especially those with regard to damage, are grossly inaccurate.

Surveying the above categories of figures together, there is the strong possibility that national output experienced a general increase. Even if one should discount the small increases in some of the years as a margin of error, the cumulative increases over a period of several years seemed too sizable to be discounted the same way. The food grains output of 1957 represented an increase of 82 per cent from that of 1949 and 18.8 per cent from that of 1954, the year when co-operatives began to mutiply rapidly. This assumption of a certain amount of increase in output found support in many agricultural measures undertaken during these years which should result in growth of production. While it is still difficult to isolate the factor of collectivization in such measures, we can attempt some tentative analysis of it.

A leading measure was the expansion of cultivated land through reclamation. Statistics in this respect varied in different Communist sources. The total cultivated land of the country, according to one version, stood at 1,670 million mow in 1957, representing an increase of 14 per cent over 1949, the year the Communists came into power, and an increase of 5.2 per cent over 1953, the beginning of the first five-year plan and the year before collectivization picked up momentum.[9] Reclamation of waste land was emphasized in the Communist agricultural policy. An expansion of the area under cultivation would naturally add to the nation's agricultural production, but the contribution of collectivization to the extensive reclamation of land is hard to determine. Concerted action from a large team had apparent advantages over an individual peasant and his family in reclaiming new land which required collective labor in leveling the land, in irrigation, or in draining waterlogged areas. Reclamation was a frequent item in the reports of accomplishments by the mutual-aid teams in the early 1950's and the co-operatives.

Of paramount importance to Chinese agricultural production are water control and irrigation. In this respect, there is little doubt that the Communist government had achieved prominent tangible results, with collective labor from the co-operatives a noticeable contributing force. Large-scale hydraulic projects now in progress, such as the control of the Huai River and the Yellow River, are undertakings by provincial and central governments, as traditionally practiced, with little direct relation to collective labor provided by the co-operatives. But numerous small local projects were accomplished with collectivization as an apparent contributing factor. From 1949 to 1956, irrigation ditches and ponds constructed numbered over fourteen million and in 1956 alone over four million. In the same years over five million irrigation wells were dug, with over three million dug in 1956. During these seven years, the Ministry of Water Conservancy lent the peasants (presumably mainly to the co-operatives) over one million water wheels, 500,000 of which were loaned in 1956.[10]

The result of these undertakings was the expansion of high-yielding irrigated acreage. In 1956 there were 515 million mow of irrigated land, accounting for about 31 per cent of the country's total area under cultivation in the same year. This irrigated area represented an increase of 41.6 per cent over the some 300 million mow in 1949, and about 100 million or 46.5 per cent of the 215 million mow of new expansion were brought under irrigation in 1956.[11]

This process of expansion went on vigorously in most of the provinces. In Honan Province there were seven million mow of irrigated land before the Communists came; between 1949 and 1955 this was expanded to 14 million mow, doubling the area. But an additional 36 million mow was brought under irrigation in 1956 by utilizing the collective labor of the co-operatives to open ditches, sink wells, and build ponds and reservoirs.[12] Co-operatives in Yüsi special administrative district of Yunnan Province were reported to have turned 1,180,000 mow of the total of 2,020,000 mow of arable land into irrigated fields in 1956.[13]

In Kwangtung Province, where Nanching is located, hydraulic projects also developed speedily. Between 1950 and 1956 dams were built across more than 300 streams,[14] and 208 water control and irrigation projects were completed costing over 20,000 yuan each (about $8,000 United States currency at the official rate) and 75,000 projects were completed, each of which cost less than 20,000 yuan. These projects brought irrigation to 7,730,000 mow of land, or about 14 per cent of the province's crop area.[15] The co-operatives were instrumental to these developments. In San-shui county of this province, for example, a co-operative mobilized 1,300 men and women to complete a 300-foot dam to control spring floods and to relieve autumn droughts.[16] In a country of irrigational agriculture like China extensive development of hydraulic projects alone is likely to bring about appreciable increase in agricultural output. In pre-Communist Nanching agricultural experts had long proposed the construction of two reservoirs on the high points on the northern side of the village so that water could be collected and stored from the surrounding higher slopes; this water could be gravity-fed through ditches to the village's dry land on the low hill sides, turning the land into paddy fields. It was estimated that completion of this project would raise the rice output of the village by at least one-third. The heavy financial requirement for labor and land site had discouraged clan leaders from seriously considering such a project. Assuming collectivization of the village's farms, both collective labor and land site could be provided by the co-operative without great difficulty.

Closely related to hydraulic projects and vital to increased agricultural production is the expansion of double-crop areas. Published Communist information indicated a steady expansion of double-crop acreage. It was claimed that from 1953 to 1956 double-crop land increased by 8.7 per cent (no concrete figures given).[17] In 1956 alone there was an increase of 100 million mow of new double-crop land, or slightly less than 6.0 per cent of the nation's total cultivated land.[18] In Kwangtung Province 14 million mow or about 25 per cent of the total of 56 million mow of cultivated land were double-crop acreage in 1956. A survey showed that an additional 16 million mow of the province's cultivated land could be planted with a winter crop in addition to the spring crop, thus increasing the double-crop area from 25 to 53.5 per cent of all land under cultivation in the province. The Communist authorities were setting this as a target.[19] Even partial success would obviously bring substantial increase in the province's total agricultural output.

Other measures in improving agricultural production which the Communists undertook with varying degrees of success included the popularization of superior strains of plants and certain methods of cultivation. As early as 1951 strenuous propaganda was directed toward popularization of superior strains tested for higher yields and suitability to different localities. By 1956, 36 per cent of the country's total crop area was said to be planted in superior strains, and 90 per cent of all the cotton acreage was reported to be in superior strains.[20] In Kwangtung Province the Communist authorities were trying to popularize a strain of rice called "Golden Bamboo" with the claim that it was able to yield up to one-third more per mow than the current varieties. There is no information about the success of this effort. In the rice region Communist sources of information claimed widespread success in introducing to vast areas the method of close planting of rice seedlings as a means of raising production. The traditional method was to plant rice seedlings in large clumps and to space the clumps rather far apart. The new method is to plant the seedlings in small clumps closer together. By 1955, 27 million mow or 46.2 per cent of the province's crop land was said to have been planted by the new method.[21]

In other aspects of farm improvement the Communists seemed to have been less successful. Increasing fertilizer is vital to the effort of raising production. The Communists, faced with a shortage of capital and facilities for manufacturing chemical fertilizer, have stressed labor exertion in collecting human and animal excreta, garbage, compost, and dirt from bottoms of streams and ponds. This "fertilizer collection movement," while requiring no capital investment aside from labor, faced the obstacles of a shortage of fertilizer that could be economically collected in comparison to the vast needs, and of initial organizational difficulties of the co-operatives. With reference to the latter, while many co-operatives reported overfulfillment of the quota of fertilizer to be collected,[22] many others lagged far behind the target and resorted to falsifying information to cover up their failure. Thus in Jung-an county in Kwangsi Province the People's Council reported in early 1956 that the amount of fertilizer accumulated exceeded the need of spring farming by 50 per cent and amounted to 90 per cent of the year's total requirement. Later investigation by higher Communist authorities disclosed that even the best co-operatives in that district had collected only 15 per cent of the fertilizer required for the year, and that the poorly organized co-operatives had collected but 5 per cent of the annual need.[23] A start has been made in enlarging the chemical fertilizer industry, but its national output was only 747,000 tons in 1956. It has been estimated that not until 1962, the end of the second five-year plan, can the output reach six million tons a year,[24] a quantity commensurate with the nation's requirements.

Another aspect of farm improvement in which the Communists have failed to score significant advancement up to 1958 is the matter of tools and implements. Certain simple improvements were introduced into traditional tools such as the plough, but their unstandardized quality, their short supply, and their unsuitability to local conditions in some regions remained unresolved problems.[25] General use of mechanized implements such as the tractor, the symbol of modern agriculture, is admitted to be some years away.[26] Although such equipment is suited to the large collectivized farm on flat terrains, limited production from the infant agricultural implement industry and the difficulty of operating mechanized equipment on hilly terrains in many parts of the country preclude extensive mechanization as an immediate means of raising the nation's agricultural production.

Thus the different aspects of farm improvement presented varying degrees of success and failure. In view of the several vital areas in which the Communists had obviously made advancement, it is probable that the nation's total agricultural output had increased partly because of the collectivization program. The advantage of collective labor in reclamation and hydraulic projects has been pointed out. In other forms of farm improvement such as double-cropping, popularization of superior strains, and better planting methods, the contribution of the co-operative lay in the centralized direction and control of farming operation by the cadres who followed directives with little regard for the inertia of traditional methods. While control of the co-operatives by agriculturally uninitiated cadres damaged certain aspects of production, as admitted in Communist documents, the collective system facilitated extensive adoption of certain standardized measures helpful to the growth of production.

Intimately related to the improvement of farming and increase of production was the supply of capital. A part of the rationale for liquidating the economic status of the landlords was to transfer their land and wealth to the poor peasants for use in production. However, as previously pointed out, peasants after land reform were still in critical need of capital. This situation hampered the operation of the mutual-aid teams and later the co-operatives. T'ao Chu, Governor of Kwangtung Province, stated: "Many co-operatives have neither a single buffalo with which to plow the land nor a single cent as working capital." [27] Before the spring planting of 1956, co-operatives in Ying-teh county in the same province faced a shortage of 500 buffaloes and a large quantity of seed.[28]

Now that the landlords' wealth had been transferred to the peasants, where could fresh capital come from? One source was of course the income from the co-operatives, which was emphasized in Communist documents. Liu Jui-lung, Vice-Minister of Agriculture, suggested setting aside 15 to 20 per cent of the co-operative's gross receipts for capital accumulation,[29] but there were serious difficulties in putting this procedure into practice due to its depressing effect on the income of the co-operative's members, the majority of whom had trouble in making ends meet. Another source of capital could be the peasants' savings. There were reports of individual co-operatives which had succeeded in raising their needed capital mainly from its members,[30] but it is doubtful whether such cases can be regarded as at all typical. However, credit co-operatives, drawing savings from individuals, were reported growing rapidly in the countryside, totaling 116,000 throughout the nation in 1956, during which every rural district was said to have one or more.[31] If successfully developed, such organizations could be of financial assistance to the co-operatives, but there was no information on the size of their capital or details of their operations.

Thus government loans were the major source of capital supply about which there is some general information. For instance, in 1956, the state made agricultural loans amounting to 2.2 billion yuan, in addition to 1.2 billion yuan paid in advance by the state for purchase of agricultural products from the co-operatives.[32] But there was little information on the nature of such state loans and the extent to which the country's vast needs were adequately met. Perhaps some inference could be made from the figures in Kwangtung Province. In 1956 the government banks extended rural credit to the total of 40,000,000 yuan for the entire province. Of this total, 14,000,000 yuan was for helping poor peasants pay admission costs to the co-operatives and the rest was to assist the co-operatives in buying buffaloes and defraying other costs of production.[33] On the assumption of complete collectivization of the province's farms, we may measure the adequacy of the loans by distributing all of the 40,000,000 yuan over the province's 56,000,000 mow of crop land. This yields an average of about 0.70 yuan (27 cents United States currency) per mow, insufficient for the annual cost of fertilizer alone.

In the long run, the co-operatives would, if successfully developed, provide their own capital; but in the initial stage of development the shortage of capital and the apparently small assistance from the state might handicap the co-operatives from performing their primary function of increasing production.

Income Distribution

It is income, not production, that offers incentive for the members and functions as an integrating goal for the cohesion of the collective organization. For the peasants the basic function of any economic institution, whether in the form of the family farm or a co-operative, is to provide an organized means for making a living, and if possible, achieving abundance; and for a peasantry whose majority constantly struggled between subsistence and starvation this function was to be realized *now* and not in the near or distant future. Hence, upon the amount of income depended the loyalty of the membership toward the newly enacted organization of the co-operatives.

It has been pointed out that income represented only a part of the production from the land. As a national average for 1956, the most consistent among many Communist versions assigned 68.5 per cent of the gross production of the co-operatives to be the income distributed to the members, after deducting 6.5 per cent for taxes and 25.0 per cent for collective expenditures including production costs, management expenses, and funds for capital accumulation and membership welfare. This 68.5 per cent of the total output was equivalent to a per capita income of 580 catties of food grains in 1956, as compared with 521 catties in 1952, thus showing an increase in per capita income of 11.3 per cent since land reform.[34]

Another set of Communist figures, comparing the income of 1956 to that of 1949, allowed only 60 per cent of the national total agricultural output as the peasants' net income. In monetary terms, the per capita net income of the peasants was 42 yuan in 1949 and 66 yuan in 1956, registering an increase of 24 yuan or 57.4 per cent.[35] While this set of figures gave no explanation for allowing 60 per cent of the ouput as net income, its monetary figures are useful for studying the regional and group variations of income.

What did the 66 yuan per capita peasant income mean in terms of the actual standard of living? A general picture can be obtained from one of the few factual cases given in Communist publications, the expense record of a Li family in a co-operative in the central-south province of Hunan in 1955.[36] This family of six members spent a total of 301 yuan (about $92 United States currency) or 50 yuan a person in that year for the following items: husked rice, 2,310 catties at a total cost of 174.9 yuan; melon, 800 catties at 10.6 yuan; cooking oil, 24 catties at 13.44 yuan; salt, 60 catties at 9 yuan; pork, 40 catties at 18.4 yuan; bean curd and salted beans, 3.6 yuan; sugar, 2 catties at .96 yuan; soy bean and vermicelli, 5.3 yuan; gourmet powder, 1.5 yuan; cloth, 72 Chinese feet (or 12 Chinese feet per person) at 28.8 yuan; stockings, 6 pairs at 3 yuan; rubber shoes, 1 pair at 4.5 yuan; expense for production, 12 yuan (private sideline production); and medical expenses, 12 yuan.

This listing of expenses represented a comfortable standard of peasant living which could be bought at the cost of 50 yuan per capita in Hunan and adjacent central-southern provinces and would be similar to the middle peasant's standard in pre-Communist Nanching. Considering the differences in prices and local standard of living, a similar standard of living could be had for about 10 yuan more per capita in South China and the Northeast and for 10 yuan less in North China.[37] If the average peasant throughout the country made about 60 yuan per person in 1956, his standard of living would be comparable to that of the well-to-do middle peasant, and he would definitely fare better than before collectivization.

However, since the figures for national average per capita income were not accompanied by any standard deviation or other associated statistical information, and therefore could represent a wide range of individual variations which would seriously affect its representative character, we should examine the regional differences.

In Lungchi county of Fukien Province, one of the high-output and high-income localities in South China, the average per capita income in 1956 was 99.3 yuan, and the per capita cost for an average comfortable peasant living was 80 yuan. There was a surplus of some 20 yuan per head or 100 yuan per family of five. In the eastern coastal province of Kiangsu, the per capita income for 1956 varied greatly among its 83 counties: over 100 yuan in two counties, 70 to 99 yuan in 23 counties, 50 to 69 yuan in 16 counties, 20 to 49 yuan in 14 counties, and only 19.5 yuan in one county. In view of the fact that in order to have a living comparable to that of the Li family it would take between 50 to 79 yuan per head, depending on the locality, a good number of the counties had an insufficient per capita income. In the northern province of Shensi the average per capita income also differed widely: 125.7 yuan in the industrial crop (mainly cotton) region containing 15.3 per cent of the province's rural population, 42.8 yuan in the hilly region containing 34.6 per cent of the province's rural population, and 15.6 yuan in the poor mountain region containing 8.7 per cent of the province's rural population. Since it would cost about 40 to 50 yuan per person to have a tolerable life in this province, it is apparent that a substantial portion of the rural population were unable to meet their minimum economic needs.[38]

These regional figures of income, like the national averages, embodied a range of individual cases varying from the well-to-do to the destitute poor. The Yenpei district of Shensi Province, where the minimum cost of living was around 40 yuan per capita, furnishes an example. Here in 1956, according to a Communist investigation of 2,926 co-operatives with over 1.5 million members, about 550,000 peasants or 37.0 per cent of the membership had an average per capita income of more than 40 yuan, about 370,000 or 25.3 per cent had an average income of less than 17 yuan, and 40,000 or 2.7 per cent, an income below 10 yuan.[39] In other words, in this region roughly a third of the co-operative members received an income adequate to meet the minimum needs of life.

A very interesting case study is a Communist report on nineteen co-operatives in Anyang county of Honan Province in 1956. The locality was free of natural calamities in that year, and the nineteen co-operatives were picked from grain-producing areas, industrial crop areas, and poor mountain areas. The accompanying table is a stratified comparison between average per capita income and average per capita expenditure in the years of 1955 and 1956.[40] The table shows that in 1955 all groups from the poor peasants to the upper-middle peasants had a financial deficit, and that in 1956, while the poor peasants were still unable to make ends meet, all the other groups seemed to have received an income slightly in excess of their expenditure. Expenditure figures were not given for former rich peasants and landlords, but judging from their income figures, their average expenditures could only be in the range of the poor peasants. It is interesting to note that these two groups received the largest percentage increase in their income in 1956, the year of wholesale collectivization.

TABLE 1

	1955		*1956*		*Per cent change between 1955 and 1956*	
Status	*Per capita income (yuan)*	*Per capita expenditure (yuan)*	*Per capita income (yuan)*	*Per capita expenditure (yuan)*	*Per capita income*	*Per capita expenditure*
Poor peasants	39.52	44.65	51.84	55.60	+31.17	+24.60
New lower-middle peasants	48.82	54.40	61.38	58.80	+25.72	+ 8.10
New upper-middle peasants	53.73	57.46	63.41	61.50	+18.01	+ 7.04
Former lower-middle peasants	54.59	56.64	62.07	60.40	+14.85	+ 6.65
Former upper-middle peasants	51.00	57.20	59.08	61.45	+15.85	+ 7.45
Former rich peasants	41.19	—	56.45	—	+37.04	—
Former landlords	37.39	—	52.12	—	+39.39	—
General average	49.53	—	59.63	—	+20.30	—

Since the income figures were averages for entire classes, the fact that an entire class showed an increase does not preclude the possibility that some members suffered a decrease. For instance, in this area the average per capita income in 1956 as compared with that in 1955 showed an increase for 74.74 per cent of the poor peasants, no change for 20.08 per cent, and a decrease for 5.17 per cent. The corresponding percentages for former upper-middle peasants were 62.13, 19.73, and 18.14.[41] For the nation as a whole, comparing the per capita incomes in 1956 with those of 1955, the Communists claimed that 75.50 per cent of all peasants enjoyed an increase, 14.72 saw no change, and 9.87 suffered a decrease.[42]

To sum up, if we accept the Communist figures at their face value, the co-operatives brought improvement in income to the peasants in certain regions and at certain economic levels, but a large portion of the peasants in general still had difficulty meeting their minimum economic requirements. Thus, about 25 to 30 per cent of the nation's peasants were said to be leading a well-to-do middle peasant's life, 15 per cent were poor peasants still suffering from cold and hunger, and the remaining 55 to 60 per cent ranged between the two extremes.[43]

Granting that extensive agricultural improvements such as water conservancy and increase of double-crop areas brought certain gains to the national farm output under collectivization, it still remains to estimate how much of those gains went to increase the income of the peasants. If it can be assumed that in 1957 somewhat less than one-third of the peasantry in the nation received a satisfactory income, and that the income for the rest was still too small to offer a satisfactory or even tolerable living, it is then necessary to examine the factors that have claimed part of the agricultural output against the peasants' income.

A major claim on the peasants' production has always been taxes paid to the government. Communist sources of information have disclosed no consistent figures or any clear picture as to how much taxes the peasants as members of co-operatives have paid to the state. Communist sources have stated that the principal agricultural tax amounted to 10.7 per cent of the nation's total agricultural output in 1956, as against 13.2 per cent in 1952, showing a lightening of taxes under collectivization.[44] The computation of another Communist source put the agricultural tax in 1956 at only 8.3 per cent of the nation's grain output.[45] But these figures did not include the local surtax, which varied from 15 to 20 per cent of the principal tax according to localities and in certain places was even higher. These figures of both principal tax and surtax were percentages of agricultural output and not of the peasants' total income, which included agricultural and subsidiary production. As a national average in 1956, the taxes took 6.5 to 7.0 per cent of the nation's total agricultural and subsidiary production, but this national average, even if accepted at its face value, contained wide local variations. In 1956 the percentage of the total income from agricultural and subsidiary production going into taxes was 12.7 for 121 higher co-operatives in Chiahsing Special District of Chekiang Province, but it was from 7.0 to 9.0 per cent in Haining, Yühang, and Wukang in the same province.[46] These and similar sample figures from different localities suggest that 10 per cent of the co-operatives' income might be a more representative figure for taxes.

A heavier share taken away from income was the cost of production, which included production costs and management expenses such as salaries for the administrative personnel. A survey of 26,935 co-operatives in different parts of the country in 1956 showed that the average cost of production was 25.3 per cent of the co-operatives' total income, with local variations ranging from 14.5 per cent in the efficient co-operatives, and 20.93 per cent for those with medium efficiency, to 30.1 per cent for those with low efficiency.[47] Communist sources furnished no itemized analysis of these composite figures of costs of production. While cost items such as seed, fertilizer, and tools had been traditional expenses in the old family farm, management expenses were distinctly new burdens. Management expenses could be rather heavy payments to the administrative cadres who performed no physical labor, as could be inferred from the substantial reduction of the total cost of production by several suburban co-operatives in Peking after drastically reducing the administrative personnel.

Another cost item connected with operation of the co-operative was the funds for capital accumulation and for membership welfare such as subsidies for orphans and widows and families having low labor earning power. This generally took about 5 per cent of the co-operative's total income.[48]

If it can be generally assumed that of the total agricultural and subsidiary production of a co-operative about 10 per cent went for taxes, 25 per cent for production cost, and 5 per cent for public funds, then about 60 per cent of the total output was retained as income to be distributed to the peasant members. In localities where surtaxes were high and the co-operatives were saddled with excessive management costs, only about 50 per cent of the total output went for income for the members. On the other hand, when these cost items were low, the peasants would get about 70 per cent of the output.[49]

Inadequate as these figures are, it is interesting to compare them with pre-Communist conditions. One Communist source stated that during the period 1931–1936 land rent and government taxes accounted for about 36 per cent of the peasants' income from agricultural and subsidiary production, excluding costs to the peasants in the forms of usury and commercial exploitation by grain merchants.[50] This gave the peasants an income of about 64 per cent of their total production, before deducting costs of production, an income which compared closely with what the peasants received under collectivization. Comparing these national averages with pre-Communist Nanching as a southern suburban village, the net income under collectivization represented a gain for the tenant farmers but a setback for the owner farmer, as the tenants kept only about 50 per cent of the gross yield after deducting rent and costs of production, with the land owner paying the taxes, but the owner-farmer kept about 80 per cent of the gross income after deducting taxes and costs of production. What makes it difficult to draw a clear-cut comparison is the fact that in pre-Communist Nanching a majority of the villagers were neither pure tenants nor pure owner-farmers but a combination of the two. If we may venture a guess, for these peasants their pre-Communist net income as a percentage of their gross output compared very closely with the 60–70 per cent range under the co-operatives.

In addition to taxes and costs of production, including the newly imposed management expenses, another factor affecting the peasants' income was the compulsory delivery of agricultural products to the government at low prices, a situation common to all Communist states practicing agricultural collectivization. The basic reason for this practice was the state's vast needs for grain and agricultural commodities at a low price so that industrialization could be accomplished without disturbing the price equilibrium by inflation. Without political compulsion, peasants obviously would not part with their grain for prices lower than obtainable in a free market, which still existed to a limited extent in spite of rigid government control and nationalization of commerce. This was clearly indicated in Communist statements such as the following:

> . . . the principle and policy . . . consists, on the one hand, of stepping up agricultural production, that is, immediate introduction of socialist transformation and technical reform of agriculture to increase grain output rapidly so as to ensure the needs arising from growth of the national economy. This is a fundamental way of solving the problem, but *it would take a long time* [italics added] before it can be achieved. On the

> other hand, the guiding principle and policy consists in making rational distribution of stocks of grain and regulating the circulation of marketable grain so that the existing stocks of grain can meet the needs of society before agricultural production can be stepped up rapidly. That is to say, purchase and sale of grain should be planned . . . The spontaneity of the peasants is restricted . . . Inasmuch as the state has fixed the quantity of grain to be produced by the peasants and the quantity of grain to be purchased from the peasants, production tasks and sale tasks are assigned to the peasants who are under obligation to fulfill these tasks, thereby obliging the peasants to interest themselves in the socialist construction of the country.[51]

Under this policy, the peasants were required to deliver at government prices 80 to 90 per cent of the *surplus* grains after deducting the needed amount for food consumption for the family, for seed, and for animal feed. The food quota which a family was allowed to keep for its own consumption was figured on a per capita basis, which varied with the types of staples in different regions, the individual's age, and whether his occupation involved heavy physical labor. In the rice region this per capita quota ranged from 264 to 660 catties a year, with an average of about 450 catties. In the North, where the climate is colder and the staples consist mainly of millet and *kaoliang* (giant millet), the average could be about a hundred catties above this.[52] With the quota of grain for home consumption rigidly fixed, it was clear that the government intended to extract the maximum amount of surplus from the peasants' output, and that the co-operatives were an important means of achieving, through collective control, disposition of the production from the land.

The Communist policy of "unified purchase and unified sales" was instituted in 1953, the beginning of the first five-year plan. Since then, how much grain was thus extracted from the countryside? We have the figures in the accompanying tabulation for the country as a whole (in 100 million catties of grain).[53] As widespread protests against the compulsory delivery system rose in the country, the Communists pointed to these figures as evidence that the net amount of grain removed from

	1954–55	*1955–56*	*1956–57*
Total output	3,390	3,679	3,855
State taxes and purchase	1,078	1,041	994
Sold back to rural areas	494	405	490
Net grain taken out of rural areas	584	636	504
Net grain taken out as percentage to total output	17.2	17.3	13.1

the countryside was not excessive, that it was decreased in 1956–57, and that the government also sold back at low prices to the countryside almost one-half of what was taxed and purchased so as to help rural families that produced insufficient grain for home consumption.[54] It was further pointed out that a sizable part of the agricultural products collected was spent for the benefit of the peasants in the form of agricultural improvements, education, health, and communications.[55]

While these arguments had merit, they did not succeed in reducing the peasants' dislike for the system of compulsory delivery and the cooperatives as an instrument of this policy. For the impoverished peasants there was realistic meaning only in their actual share after deducting taxes and state purchase, a per capita amount which was said to be 549 catties in 1954–55, 577 catties in 1955–56, and 620 catties in 1956–57 [56] and which did not leave much margin beyond the estimated minimum per capita grain consumption of about 450 catties in the rice region and 550 catties in the wheat region. Judging from Communist statistics that 18.43 per cent of some 110,000,000 farm households in 1955 were poor peasants without enough food to eat, and that about 30 per cent of them had surplus grain for hoarding and speculation, it is possible that about 50 per cent of the peasant households had little or no surplus, and that nearly one-fifth of them were in want, despite the contrary claim that 62.36 per cent of them belonged to the grain-surplus category.[57]

What had made the peasants restive, of course, was the price paid by the government for the delivered grain. Communist sources of information pictured the government prices as fair and satisfactory on three grounds. First, government prices had shown a percentage increase every year since 1952. Second, while agricultural prices had gone up 48.76 per cent in 1950–56, prices of industrial goods had come down 27.89 per cent. Third, after deducting the costs of production and taxes, the government prices in 1957 gave the producers a profit of 31.41 per cent for each catty of soy bean, 21.45 per cent for corn, 34.62 per cent for kaoliang, and 54.18 per cent for rice.[58] But no Communist source has provided information on the actual prices paid by the government for agricultural products, thus making impossible any comparison with the free market prices before 1953 or with pre-Communist prices. Despite the Communist charge that the peasants demanded speculation prices for their grain, whether the prices were satisfactory to the peasants could be inferred from popular reaction toward them.

After inauguration of the compulsory delivery system in 1953, there arose a general complaint among the peasants: "Government purchase has no limit, and it serves no purpose to increase production." [59] Hoarding of grain became a common practice. Even Chou En-lai admitted: "But we also made mistakes. In 1954, because we did not completely grasp the situation of grain production in the whole country, and purchased a little more grain from the peasants than we should have, there was discontent among a section of the peasants." [60] In spite of the overall increase in crop areas in the country as a whole since 1952, as indicated in Communist statistics, the crop area in many localities saw a decrease as a result of the peasants' discontent over compulsory delivery. In Ssu-hui county of Kwangtung Province, about 80 miles south of Nanching, the planted area of early crop was reduced from 36,000 mow in 1955 to 24,000 mow in the spring of 1956, a reduction of 38.2 per cent, owing mainly to the peasants' complaint that what they harvested did not belong to them.[61]

There is no information as to what effective steps were taken after 1956 to remedy this situation aside from an assertion from Mao Tse-tung:

> We are prepared to maintain, in several years, the quantity of food grains collected and purchased at the level of over 80 billion catties (about 21 per cent of the 1957 total output) so that agriculture will be developed, co-operatives will be consolidated, some households which are short of food grains at present will not be short of food grains, all peasant households, except those in the industrial crop areas, will be turned into self-sufficient households . . .[62]

Still another factor affecting the peasants' income was the reduction of subsidiary production under collectivization. The weight of this factor lay in the traditional importance of subsidiary occupations as a supplement to the main crop income in an agrarian economy troubled by shortage of land, a situation which continued under collectivization, as attested by the Communist statement: "In China, the income of peasants from subsidiary occupations has always reached around one-third of their income." [63] This average, of course, embodied a wide variation of local conditions. In the Northeast, where land is comparatively plentiful, subsidiary occupations did not account for as heavy a share of the peasants' total income as they did in China Proper. Again, in suburban villages such as Nanching subsidiary occupations had only limited importance because of the proximity to seasonal urban employment and sizable emigrants' remittances. But in Chiahsing Special District of Chekiang Province in 1956 side occupations accounted for 50 yuan or 14.3 per cent of 350 yuan, the total average annual income of a peasant family. A survey of fourteen co-operatives in Kiangsu

Province in 1957 revealed that side occupations contributed 50 to 60 per cent to the total income in the northern part of the province and 40 to 50 per cent in the southern part.[64]

It is therefore apparent that partial or complete removal of this source of income would result in serious economic crisis for the peasant family unless the lost income were counterbalanced by a corresponding increase of income from the main crop. It is also apparent that, even granting a certain increase in main crop production from technical improvements under collectivization, any major setback in subsidiary occupations would lead to a net reduction of the total income of the peasants. This was evidenced in actual cases occasionally mentioned in Communist sources. In the Yungming Co-operative in Tunghsiang county of Kiangsi Province in 1956, when the number of subsidiary occupations in which its members used to engage was forcibly reduced in the process of "simplification of production," 45 per cent of its members had their income reduced despite the fact that its rice crop showed an increased output of 39.4 per cent over 1955.[65] Many were the cases in various parts of the country in which interference with subsidiary occupations by the Communist leaders in the co-operatives led to a decline in the peasants' income.

Subsidiary production suffered a widespread drop in the country, particularly during 1955 and 1956, chiefly because of two reasons: the shortage of capital and forcible suppression by the cadres. After collectivization, co-operatives were under pressure to concentrate all available financial and labor resources to fulfill assigned quotas of main crop production, thus leaving little investment for subsidiary occupations. An important point in the situation was that, since subsidiary occupations were generally taken up by the family as a private enterprise, when peasants found their total income decreased under collectivization and turned to subsidiary production they diverted available labor force in the co-operative from crop production, which was the main preoccupation of the cadres directing the co-operatives. Hence the cadres gave no encouragement to subsidiary production and even forcibly suppressed such activities in certain cases. Some peasants who busied themselves with side-line enterprises to the neglect of regular production in the co-operative were harshly handled and made to recant their "mistake" in public.[66]

The consequence of such action was, of course, a drastic reduction in subsidiary production. Silk and tea, leading items of subsidiary production in the past, showed a precipitous drop. The nation's production of silk cocoons was 4,416,000 tan (1 tan equals 100 catties or 133 pounds) in 1931, but only 1,625,000 tan in 1957. The nation's tea production in 1932 was 4,500,000 tan, but the estimate for 1957 was only 2,525,000 tan.[67] An interesting example is provided by the history of a co-operative consisting of 368 households in Mach'eng county in Hupei Province. In 1948, the year before the Communists came to power, the income from subsidiary occupations among these families totaled 42,000 yuan; this amount was reduced to 28,000 yuan in 1951, 26,000 in 1953, and finally to 14,000 yuan in 1955, the year when the families were pooled into a co-operative.[68]

One of the significant effects of the reduction of the peasants' income due to serious decline in subsidiary production was the heavy exodus of peasants from the countryside in many parts of China in 1955 and 1956. A Communist official report pointed out that in Kweip'ing county of Kwangsi Province decline in subsidiary production caused a mass exodus of peasants and created such a labor shortage that the spring plowing of 1956 reached only 40 per cent of the planned crop area. A traditionally important subsidiary occupation in that county was the collection of seeds from wild camellias for the pressing of oil. In 1955, because of interference from the cadres, the seeds were allowed to rot on the ground.[69] Owing to the same cause, only 35 per cent of the labor force remained in the co-operatives in Wuch'uan county in Kwangtung Province; the rest left for other places in search of a living.[70] For China as a whole, the decrease in income, whether due specifically to decline in subsidiary occupations or to a combination of other causes, was largely responsible for the fact that, from 1953 to 1957, over 8,000,000 peasants drifted to the cities, causing Communist authorities to adopt measure after measure to disperse them back to the countryside.[71]

The unsatisfactory state of the co-operatives led not only to exodus of peasants from the countryside but also to extensive withdrawals from and disbandment of co-operatives during the last months of 1956 and the first half of 1957, a spontaneous movement that seemed to affect more southern provinces than northern ones. There are no published nationwide statistics on this issue, but local figures occasionally found in Communist sources, although inadequate for analysis, reflected the extensiveness of the peasants' dissatisfaction with collectivization in many parts of the country.

Thus in May 1957 Communist authorities in Kwangtung Province reported that since the last part of 1956, 117,916 peasant households had walked out of co-operatives in the province, and that 102,149 households later rejoined, leaving a net loss of 15,767 households.[72] The number of affected peasant households in proportion to the total households was given in the case of Hsienchu county of Chekiang Province. In this county, during April and May of 1957, the proportion of collectivized farm households to all farm households dropped precipitously from 95 per cent to 16 per cent, amounting to a general dissolution of the co-operatives. It was stated that some 30,000 households had returned to the co-operatives by the fall of 1957, raising the proportion of collectivized households among all households to over 70 per cent, which was still some 25 per cent below the previous proportion of 95 per cent.[73] There was no available information as to how representative this case might be in comparison with other affected localities. The rise of collectivized farm households among all farm households from 92 per cent in 1956 to 97 per cent in 1957 in China as a whole seemed to suggest that the infectious movement of withdrawals and disbandment was not allowed to take its spontaneous course, but that effective pressure herded the disaffected peasants back into the co-operatives.

It was obvious that herding the peasants back into the co-operatives did not guarantee the continued stability of the collective organization unless the basic causes of its instability were removed. Communist discussions on this issue laid the blame for the withdrawals and disbandment mainly on the incitement by "unlawful landlords, rich peasants and counterrevolutionaries," who demanded selling less surplus grain to the government and distributing more among the co-operatives' members, and who resented the collective system in general.[74] But the extensive following for these arguments among middle and poor peasants indicated a general dissatisfaction with the co-operatives beyond the confine of the minority of former landlords, rich peasants, and counterrevolutionaries who had led in voicing it.

The base of peasant dissatisfaction was the inadequacy of income for a large section of the co-operatives' membership. Taxes, the compulsory delivery system, management expenses of the co-operative, and suppression of subsidiary occupations in the interest of the state's demand for increased production of main crops all laid claims on the total output of the co-operative against the personal income of the members. Communist discussions recognized this situation and termed it a contradiction of interests between the state, the co-operative organization, and the peasants.[75] Viewed in terms of organizational stability of the co-operative, the situation involved a contradiction of goals. As the co-operative was a newly enacted organization unsupported by the inertia of tradition, the peasants were willing to remain in it only so long as its goals were tangible in relation to their immediate personal interests. The interests of the state and the collective organization sounded vague and distant to a peasantry whose minds were still concerned largely with the small local world and the family, and whose economic status still rested on a narrow margin between subsistence and deprivation. Even if collectivization were able to effect a certain increase in agricultural production, curtailment of personal income as a share of the output would remove the main incentive of tangible benefits which alone could successfully integrate the peasants to the co-operative organization.

The Communist leadership, fully aware of this situation, tried to resolve it by various means. By stabilizing the amount of grain to be taxed and purchased by the government to an absolute level of about 80 billion catties for the nation, they aimed at distributing a larger share of the increased production to the members so as to provide incentive for raising production in the co-operatives. The original target was to distribute 60 to 70 per cent of the total output to the members. A more liberalized policy toward subsidiary production was adopted in 1957, organizing certain subsidiary enterprises on a collective basis while leaving certain others to the peasants as private family undertakings. It was stated that, in Lin-an county of Chekiang Province, when subsidiary occupations were revived in 1956, 106 out of 146 co-operatives were able to give 90 per cent of their members an increase of income over the previous year.[76]

Political pressure and propaganda were employed along with other policies to stabilize the co-operatives. In 1957 there was the nationwide anti-rightist movement which, in the countryside, was aimed at suppressing articulate well-to-do peasants and other minority elements who led the movement of withdrawal from the co-operatives. There was the "great socialist debate," intended to convince the poor and lower middle peasants of the superiority of the co-operative organization over the small family farm, an argument supported by some cases of poor peasants who withdrew from the co-operatives only to find themselves at the mercy of usurers and "exploiters" who employed them as hired hands.[77] Whether the new policies of increasing the peasants' income, suppressing opposition, and strengthening propaganda efforts were able to stabilize the collective system remains uncertain.

CHAPTER XVII

Organizational Problems of the Agricultural Producers' Co-operatives

BASIC TO the organizational problems of collectivization was the sudden integration of the small family farm into a large operational unit totally strange to the peasants' knowledge of group life and to their traditional sense of self-interest. A wide range of problems arose from the very factor of size of the collective organization.

The 1,088,000 co-operatives in the spring of 1956 had an average of 50 farm households per unit of the elementary type and 250 households per unit of the advanced type.[1] By the spring of 1957 a vast majority of the elementary co-operatives had been consolidated into the much larger advanced types, and some of the oversized advanced co-operatives were reduced somewhat in membership, with the result that the number of co-operatives totaled 752,113, averaging 158.1 farm households per co-operative.[2] In the majority of cases, "one village–one co-operative" became a general guiding principle, although a large village might contain more than one co-operative and several small villages in close proximity might form one co-operative.[3] On the basis of five persons to the household, a co-operative of 158.1 households would contain approximately 800 persons. Although these are averages embodying a range of sizes, it seems likely that the village af Nanching, with its 230 families and about 1,100 population, was transformed into one large co-operative.

Structurally, as of 1957, the collective organization was subdivided into two levels: the family at the base was responsible for "mobilizing the labor force"; the production teams, consisting of about 20 farm households each, were the operational units for specific tasks of agricultural production. There were subdivisions of unspecified size for subsidiary production. The central administrative committee of the co-operative exercised unified management over the production teams on matters such as the use of means of production, production plans, capital construction, technical measures, raising of funds, distribution of labor power, labor point norms, distribution plans, and fiscal and accounting system.[4] In 1957, production teams were found to be hampered by excessively rigid control from the administrative committee and were granted limited authority over production plans, technical measures, work norms, and fiscal work.[5]

This structural picture more accurately reflected the policy of the Communist authorities on the co-operatives' organization than it reflected the actual situation, which differed widely with individual co-operatives and localities. In view of the many directives issued on the subject, it was probable that the functioning of the organizational system had not yet become stabilized. Since effective administrative power lay solely in the hands of the Communist cadres assigned to lead the co-operatives, administrative committees had interfered unduly and unwisely with production teams, the basic operational units. On the other hand, the Communists had been hesitant about giving the production teams too much autonomy for fear of disrupting the unity of management of the co-operative.

The relationship between the individual peasant and the co-operative was similarly beset with serious transitional problems arising from the abrupt rearrangement of economic relations from that of the small family farm to that of the large collective organization. In the close personal relationships of the small family farm, the economic organization was carefully and flexibly geared to the personal needs of a limited number of members, and the simplicity and intimate nature of the family enabled each member to clearly see family welfare as the group goal and the relation of his own interest to that goal. Furthermore, these and other less apparent relationships between the individual and family interests had been stabilized by a system of traditional values pertaining to the family as a socio-economic base of life. The family group, therefore, was a well-integrated working team in which everyone knew his production role and understood the significance of every production act, and in which all available labor and material resources were used to carry on the common undertaking of the family farm.

In the process of collectivization, the individual was suddenly wrenched from this well-knit matrix and thrown into a large organization of 800 or even a thousand people whose goal of group welfare appeared only intangibly related to the individual's interest. Moreover, whereas in the functioning of the family farm there was a low degree of personnel differentiation in matters such as production plans, use of tools, distribution of financial and labor resources, enforcement of work norms, and fiscal and accounting system, in the co-operative these tasks became operations of specialized functionaries, thus reducing the average peasants to mechanical laborers tilling the soil and decreasing their personal involvement with the total operation of the farm. It is not difficult to see why there was lack of understanding and personal concern for the proper functioning of the co-operative on the part of the family–farm-minded peasants, and why in many localities the family subsidiary production and the family vegetable plots thrived while the co-operative fields were poorly worked. In one co-operative in Tseng-ch'eng county of Kwangtung Province, Communist officials found the majority of the members preoccupied with their family vegetable plots and such side-line enterprises as sugar making, with only a small minority working on the winter crop of the co-operative and on repairing dikes, so that the co-operative lagged behind its production quota.[6]

The difficulty of adjustment by the family–farm-minded peasants to the impersonal and specialized operation of the collective organization was vividly shown in the case of a co-operative in Hsin-an village in Hun-yuan county of Shansi Province.[7] This co-operative had only 17 farm households in 1953 but grew to 127 households in 1955, accounting for 83.5 per cent of all households in the village. After 1953 the yield per mow in the co-operative decreased and the crop acreage shrank, the main causes of the set-back being general demoralization of the members, especially among the middle peasants, and the high death rate of their sheep. Since in this locality raising sheep furnished a major subsidiary income for the peasants and supplied manure as fertilizer for the village's fields, the Communist cadres had organized co-operative flocks herded into co-operative sheds. The result was loss of interest in sheep raising. When ewes were dropped, they frequently froze to death because of inadequate care. Before 1937 the village had over 600 head of sheep; there were only 241 in 1955. The number of "loads" of sheep manure per mow of crop land was 5.7 in 1953, 4.3 in 1954, and 3.6 in 1955.

An old peasant, Wu Fu, expressed his opinion on this stiuation: "When sheep were raised at home, they did not need any labor from the adults, for the children would take care of them. Under the children's loving care, the sheep grew fat and strong, with few deaths. Whatever food scraps could be spared in the family were fed to the sheep. Now a co-operative flock needs specially assigned labor, and there is a high rate of disease and death among the flocks." Subsequently, the co-operative flock was disbanded, the sheep were returned to the owners, and the peasants' morale showed improvement.

In this case, we see the contrast between personal care of the family flock and impersonal labor in a co-operative flock; we see the meticulous economy with which sheep were raised at home and the requirement of special labor and investment in the collective arrangement; we see the lack of identification of the members' personal interests with the collective goal; we see the ignorance among members about the proper procedures of operating a large organization, and we see the adverse effect of all these on the productivity of the land. This same set of factors led to the poor condition and high death rate of draft animals in localities where they were placed under centralized feeding and care,[8] a situation that reduced the farming efficiency of a large number of co-operatives.

The adjustment of the peasants to the new economic relations and operational procedures was complicated not only by the nature of the peasant himself but also by the comparative inflexibility of the co-operatives in relation to the needs of the individual members. In a family farm, labor and financial resources were arranged to meet the general as well as the particular needs of all members, and in an emergency even land or capital equipment could be sold to tide over an individual or family crisis. But the large co-operative farm was structurally adjusted to the standardized needs of the extensive membership, leaving the individual to shift for himself to satisfy his particular personal needs; the use of labor and financial resources in a co-operative was governed by uniform regulations, and could not be arranged to suit personal needs of individual members. The standardized collective system might work among a people having moderate savings to meet particular individual or family needs, but it proved difficult for a peasantry living largely from hand to mouth, as evidenced by the peasants' complaints about the inflexibility of the co-operatives and many cases of borrowing and overdrawing from the co-operative by poor peasants which impaired the financial operation of the co-operatives.[9]

At another level, the sudden establishment of some three-quarters of a million collective organizations introduced the universal problem of availability of leadership adequately trained in the new organizational concepts and operational techniques. Administrative leaders of the co-operatives fell into two categories: progressive peasants, and Communist leaders with some modern education. Leaders with peasant backgrounds had the merit of knowing the practical business of farming but suffered from the disadvantage of ignorance in operating a large organization. Those with an intellectual background generally lacked any knowledge of farming and often were plagued by bureaucratism and the old intellectual tradition of disdaining physical labor or practical work.

Indicative of technical and administrative incompetence among large numbers of co-operative leaders was the official campaign against their "waste and extravagance" in operating collective organizations during 1954–1956. Such waste and extravagance consisted mainly of unnecessary large outlays for headquarters buildings, clubhouses and expensive furnishings, nursery toys, playgrounds, investments in sports and cultural programs, electrical wiring in suburban villages, costly and not urgently needed modern farm implements. Expenditures for these items often exceeded the total liquid capital assets and available labor resources of a co-operative, and were defrayed by loans which sank many co-operatives into financial insolvency.[10] In Tz'u-hsi county of Chekiang Province 19.9 per cent of 640 co-operatives were reported to have committed serious waste.[11] Such practices seemed to have abated in 1957 after Communist official efforts to curb them.

In the highly mixed record of performance of the urban-bred cadres there was another serious shortcoming — what the Communists called bureaucratism. Although the Communists gave it no definition, we take it to mean confinement by the administrator to the formalistic activities of paper work and applying rules and regulations, thus isolating himself from the actual situation under his charge and from the membership under his command. It was well illustrated by the case of Changli county in Hainan Island in Kwangtung Province.[12] At the beginning of 1956 the co-operatives in that county set a target to increase agricultural production by 118 per cent. When higher authorities examined the actual situation before spring planting, they discovered that collected fertilizer amounted to three catties per mow, only a fraction of the needed quantity, and that only 1.2 per cent of the projected water-conservancy work had been completed. It appeared that the local officers had made production plans not by studying production data in the field but by holding meetings in the office, and then had continued to confine themselves to the office to receive false reports of operational results on which they based the "conclusions" they handed to superior authorities.

The lack of contact between leadership and members in co-operatives was vividly seen in a number of cases. To stimulate production, large numbers of co-operatives in Kwangtung Province took the label, "Thousand-catty Co-operative," signifying their goal of raising the annual production of rice to one thousand catties per mow. In 1956 cadres gave such labels to eleven co-operatives in Tseng-ch'eng county, about 60 miles south of Nanching. An investigation revealed that on the eve of spring planting no effort had been made to collect fertilizer, and that most members were completely ignorant of the fact that their co-operative carried the "Thousand-catty" label.[13]

These two illustrations are reminiscent of the classical scholar-official personality who, disdaining physical labor and reluctant to participate in actual operations with the common people, was inclined to conduct his life and work in an office, relying solely upon subordinates and retainers; and in this context it is interesting to note that, with the rapidly expanding system of modern education turning out more graduates than could be absorbed in urban employment, an increasing number of them were being sent to the countryside. In 1957 alone, over two million graduates from middle and elementary schools were sent to rural areas,[14] a large proportion of them being assigned jobs in the three-quarters of a million co-operatives in the country. If these new graduates adjusted to the rigorous hardship of rural life, they might have proven useful to the co-operatives in performing jobs requiring modern administrative and technical skills and eventually become administrative leaders. On the other hand, if these "cultured peasants" should have become critical of the way the cadres ran the co-operatives, or come into conflict with them, or be unable to bear the hardships of rural life, they might have become the articulate core of latent restive forces and function as a disruptive influence in the co-operatives. The shortage of effective leadership was undoubtedly at the root of the problem of proper functioning and cohesion of the co-operative organization.

When we consider the day-to-day working-level performance of the co-operatives in contrast to the functioning of the farm as a family affair, where administrative decisions were the result of informal interaction in an intimate family circle, with the performance of tasks by each member of the family team guided by the traditionalized routine, and the distribution of reward based on personal needs and the status system, we find that the complex problems of an organization consisting of some 800 members required new operational facilities.

Prominent among such needs was a system of bookkeeping and accounting, a problem which troubled the operation of many mutual-aid teams, and which had become more serious in the larger organization of co-operatives. The majority of peasants were traditionally ignorant of such skills; and apparently there were not enough educated leaders in each co-operative to perform such tasks in every subunit of the collective organization. In a co-operative in Wu-hsiang county of Shansi Province, many of the production team leaders were illiterate peasants who could not write names or figures. Others who were barely literate were extremely casual about keeping accounts as required of them by the new regulations because they were ignorant of the practical function of this new task. Some of them put the accounts on paper fans they happened to be using, and others jotted them down on bits of scrap paper. Another co-operative lent 70 yuan to the members, got back 30 yuan, but failed to find the debtors who owed the rest, because of the absence of accounts. In still another co-operative with about one hundred member households, even the members themselves did not remember the exact number of man-day labor units they had each put in.[15] As man-day labor units were the basis on which remuneration was distributed to the members, the confusion in the co-operative can be imagined.

With formal impersonal business relationship in the co-operative replacing the informal personal relationship of the family farm, there was obviously required some system of standards of work norms and man-day labor units, a complex matter governed not only by general principles but also by local and individual conditions. Communist authorities had issued guiding principles on the classification of skilled and unskilled labor, the definition of the work-day labor unit, and the proper ways of remuneration; but local co-operatives still faced numerous difficulties in working out arrangements satisfactory to the members and also capable of maintaining work discipline and morale. Even when the problem of classification of skilled and unskilled labor had been resolved, the system of labor units often failed to distinguish the industrious from the lazy in the same class of work, thus leading to dissatisfaction among the members. Communist reports indicated that this had been a frequent complaint from efficient middle peasants and at times their reasons for withdrawing from the co-operatives.[16]

Presumably, the influx of the millions of new graduates from the schools into the co-operatives, the vigorous literacy campaigns in the countryside, and the operation of many technical training classes would solve many of the problems requiring literacy and skills such as those required for setting up accounting systems; and such problems as the establishment of satisfactory work norms and labor units could be solved through the process of practical adjustment if adequate administrative leadership were available. There was bound to remain over a considerable period, however, the problem of peasant attitudes and values deeply rooted in the traditional way of life.

It was clear that underlying the problems of effective organization and operation of the co-operatives was a conflict between the new value system and the old. The efficient management of a co-operative inevitably required an impersonal businesslike attitude toward obligations and reward, something lacking in the traditional system. In the old family farm, obligations and reward were defined by a status system and operated on a life-time basis. Beyond the household, the peasant's economic relationships were mainly with relatives and intimate friends, obligations and reward were similarly settled on a long-term basis, and any insistence on immediate return for whatever services performed was considered "calculating" and offensive to the "warm sentiments" that tied the parties together. When the peasant was required to accept an impersonal definition of obligation and the practice of immediate or precisely timed reward under the co-operative arrangement, his reaction was one of calculating self-protection which wholly ignored the common interest of the co-operative group. Moreover, there was the persistently lingering influence of family and clan ties. The successful functioning of the collective organization relied on the uniform application of standardized values and rules to all members regardless of family or clan affiliation, but for the peasant the interests of the co-operative were vague and distant as compared to the realities of family concerns. For him, even though the family farm had been removed, the family continued to be a deeply rooted group of economic interest. When the co-operatives failed to function smoothly and when the individual's interests were not advanced by the large organization, the peasants instinctively reverted to time-tested family ties as a means of carrying on economic activities, as attested to by their preoccupation with subsidiary occupations and family vegetable plots in poorly operated co-operatives.

In concrete form the fundamental issue of reconciling the new with the old was revealed by the efforts made by the co-operatives to satisfy the peasants in the complicated matter of adjusting their differences in economic interests. This involved both the disposition of property belonging to the upper middle and rich peasants and the differential distribution of income among the general membership.

The upper middle peasants, estimated to constitute 20 per cent of the rural population in 1957, lost much in joining the co-operatives. They used to own more land than the average peasants, and now the advantage of land ownership was abolished. Their fish ponds, mulberry patches, orchards, and timber stands were collectivized under the general policy of eliminating private production enterprises, and the compensation they received for these properties was often inadequate and unfair. At times it took the form of collective credit to be paid back over a long period of years.[17] Their feeling that they had not been treated fairly had an adverse effect on the cohesion of the co-operatives. They were essential because they were more efficient farmers than the average,[18] and their numbers were substantial; and their leadership in withdrawal from and disbandment of many co-operatives was a powerfully disruptive influence.

As to the distribution of income, the co-operatives had no previous experience to guide them. Since under the influence of the Communist doctrine there was a general egalitarian mood among the masses, particularly the poor, at first some co-operatives tried equal sharing on a per capita basis. The result was that, as the main income was in the form of food grain, equal sharing gave some households with several young children a surplus of food, while other households with working adults but few or no young children were faced with a food shortage. In the latter case, people had to buy food from the government or took odd jobs for a supplementary income. Some wandered off to other places in search of work, their departure naturally affecting the production of the co-operative and reducing the collective income. A typical case concerned a co-operative in Fangch'eng county in Honan Province. "Under equal distribution of food grain, the hard-working peasants often complained against the households with a number of children, and lost interest in production. For instance, when grain was distributed last autumn [1956], a one-month-old baby of Tso Chun-teh's household shared the same amount of food grain as Chen Chin-yu, another co-operative member. Chen was so angry over it that he refused to work for five days and had a quarrel with Tso Chen-teh." After some discussion, the co-operative members finally agreed to distribute food grain according to need instead of equal sharing.[19]

For most co-operatives the distribution of income was based neither on equal sharing nor on individual needs but on the quantity and quality of labor performed under the system of labor units or points. This system favored families with many working adults and penalized the small families and those with several small children who earned no labor units. The figures in Table 2 show the differential distribution of income in relation to family size in the First and Fourth Higher Co-operatives in Yuch'eng Hsiang, Haiyen county, Chekiang Province.[20] Except for the unspecified category of "others," which seemed

TABLE 2

	No. of households	*No. of persons*	*Average no. of persons per household*	*1956 net income*		*Percentage increase in income over 1955*
				household (yuan)	*person (yuan)*	
Total	422	1,578	3.7	353.1	94.4	25.0
Poor peasants	68	193	2.8	218.3	76.8	24.3
Lower-middle peasants						
new	59	209	3.5	291.7	82.3	30.1
old	122	412	3.4	337.0	99.8	20.2
Upper-middle peasants						
new	32	142	4.4	436.0	98.2	30.1
old	132	592	4.5	455.9	101.8	26.8
Others	9	30	3.3	184.1	55.2	3.5

to comprise destitute families, the poor peasants had the smallest family size as a correlate to their having the lowest income on both the per family and the per capita bases. The reason could be traced to the man-day labor unit system as the basis of income distribution. This was shown in the case of the First Higher Co-operative of Yuch'eng Hsiang in 1956 (see Table 3). When the number of able-bodied adult workers in a household became the determinant of income, naturally, small families received the lowest income. Many of the poor-peasant households consisted of orphans, widows, and other nonworkers weakened by illness. For them the co-operatives were ordered to provide relief from the welfare funds under the so-called five-guarantee system (to be provided with food, clothing, fuel, an education, and a funeral).

TABLE 3

	No. of households	*No. of persons*	*Average no. of persons per household*	*Average no. of labor units per household**	*Average no. of work days per household in a year*
Total	271	1,269	4.7	16.0	318.6
Poor peasants	32	105	3.3	7.9	166.2
Lower-middle peasants					
new	99	421	4.3	15.3	280.4
old	48	226	4.7	16.6	287.8
Upper-middle peasants					
new	56	265	4.7	20.9	371.8
old	36	252	7.0	23.9	517.8

* Every 10 labor units are considered one standard labor power, or one man-day. Thus, a household capable of performing 16 labor units has 1.6 labor power.

There is no information concerning how adequate and how generally available such relief was.

It would appear that under the co-operatives' system of remuneration by labor units peasants would strive for large families. Since the poor peasants were at a disadvantage owing to their inability to support many young children and the prevalence among them of high rates of miscarriage and infant mortality, it would be the well-to-do peasant who would be successful in raising a large family and gaining the progressive advantage of economic betterment. In other words, the situation in the pre-Communist agrarian communities, as exemplified by our observation of Nanching, would seem not only to be perpetuated by the labor-unit system but also accentuated, since the mitigating influence of inheritance for some of the relatively fortunate small families had now been removed by collectivization.

Recapitulating the foregoing analysis, it appears that, through technical improvements, the co-operatives achieved a certain increase in agricultural production both in the total national output and in per unit area productivity for major crops. Much less conclusive is how substantial and how general an increase in income the co-operatives brought the peasants. If the pre-collectivization picture was one in which only 20 to 30 per cent of the peasants had a satisfactory income, while the rest ranged from destitution to bare subsistence, it is doubtful whether this situation was substantially changed up to the beginning of 1958.

Up till that time, the co-operatives had yet to resolve many vital structural problems pertaining to their large size, the supply and functioning of leadership, the establishment of operational norms and facilities, and the differential distribution of income. The disorganized state of a number of co-operatives was indicated by the exodus of peasants to the cities, mass walk-outs and even disbandment of co-operatives in many localities, and the sending of hundreds of thousands of functionaries from all levels of government to the rural areas in the spring of 1957 to correct the shortcomings of some co-operatives and to get some paralyzed ones back into operation.[21] In Fan Ning county, Hainan Island, Kwangtung Province, farm hands in the co-operatives remained idle on the eve of spring planting until the magistrate and the cadres personally went down to the fields and plowed the soil.[22]

Such an unsatisfactory state of collective organization was to be expected in the light of the rapidity of the transformation, and the hastiness with which some 750,000 co-operatives were set up. In the few years 1951 to 1956 the country had precipitously shifted from the small family farm, through the tumultuous land reform and the faltering mutual-aid teams, to sudden collectivization, which was mainly accomplished in the one year of 1956.

Even in an age of revolution, the speed in effecting such momentous change was explosive when we consider the magnitude of the task, involving 500,000,000 tradition-bound peasants and covering some 3,000,000 square miles of highly diversified areas, and the drastic and complex differences between the small family farm and the large collective organization. It is apparent that the time was too brief for properly carrying out the transitional steps such as originally entertained by the Communist leadership. It was claimed that 80 to 90 per cent of the co-operatives established in 1955 were built on the foundation of mutual-aid teams, but an examination of local conditions raises the question of how sound those teams were. In Lanli and Huangp'i counties of Hupei Province, 50 per cent of the mutual-aid teams were reported to be in a disorganized state, and 20 per cent were disbanded.[23] But there is no indication that the vast majority of the co-operatives, set up in 1956, had a firm foundation of mutual-aid teams. Neither had most of the higher types of co-operatives evolved from the lower types.

Transitional difficulties were probably not unexpected to the Communist leadership. Pressed by urgent needs, Mao Tse-tung in 1956 announced his strategy of launching the co-operatives first, regardless of expected difficulties, and correcting their shortcomings by later repeated "rectification campaigns." [24] In 1957, in the face of widespread difficulties and disorganization, he stuck to this decision by declaring that he would allow five or more years to build a good co-operative.[25] The Communist leaders who made this bold decision of sudden national collectivization were seasoned in the shuffling and reshuffling of millions of men into different political and military formations in the gigantic struggle for power which they won; and it is possible that they approached the reshuffling of some 500,000,000 peasants into the collective formation with the same determination and confidence. But men in a deadly political and military struggle are temporarily taken out of the complex context of normal social life and focused on the single objective of winning a contest, whereas men on a farm are subjected to the pressure from a multiplicity of immediate practical problems involved in normal community life. Whether successful political and military experience could be effectively applied to the development of a new form of economic organization, only unfolding events can tell.

Transitional difficulties do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the entire collectivization movement represents but a mirage from the Marxist-Leninist ideology, a dream which will not be realized on Chinese soil. The excessively small farm unit in the pre-Communist peasant economy, the inefficiently scattered tiny plots, the backward farming methods, the further diminution of the peasants' microscopic income due to the land tenure system, the relentlessly oppressive man-land ratio – all these had long demanded some form of drastic change. In our observations of Nanching, we noted that farming under these conditions failed to provide a majority of the peasants with minimum subsistence without supplementation from urban employment. The widespread existence of this situation underlay the great agrarian crisis in modern China. The most consistently proferred solution has been the application of modern technical improvements; the knotty problem lay in the development of an organizational vehicle to implement it. The technical limitations of the small family farm and its financial stringency in this connection are obvious. The tractor and the harvest combine, the epitome of modern agricultural technology in Chinese eyes, could not even turn around in many of the scattered microscopic plots, not to mention the astronomical financial distance between the peasant's purse and the cost of the mechanical giant.

One of the organizational alternatives is the enlargement of the farm unit through some form of pooling of the land, labor, and material resources so that through collective strength the advantages of modern technology and rational use of land and labor can be brought within range of practicability. It is here that some form of collectivism would find the social foundation on which to grow. Whether this alternative would succeed in China depends on the development of a suitable form of collectivism and a workable transitional strategy to stave off unmanageable chaos and disorganization.

Among the transitional difficulties we have analyzed, two deserve added attention: the heavy agricultural taxes and the system of compulsory delivery of products to the government at low prices. These removed a sizable proportion of any possible benefit the new organization might give its members. They prevented effective demonstration of whatever potential merits the co-operatives might have for the vital problem of increasing production and income for the peasants. True, the policies of taxes and compulsory delivery were designed to meet urgent needs of industrialization, and, in this respect, the Communist leadership was confronted with the hard problem of capital accumulation for the economic modernization of a vast country. But to sacrifice heavily for the nation's industrialization, which might motivate the behavior of an intellectual or an enlightened politician, would not easily interest peasants preoccupied with immediate problems of keeping themselves and their families from starvation, and whose mentality had long been conditioned by the tangibility of the organic cycle and the small visible village world. The forcible drain of farm products for a distant cause held no appeal to them and deprived the hastily installed co-operatives of an opportunity to gain cohesion and stability.

These national events impinged upon our little suburban village of Nanching as they did other villages in the rest of the country. Much of our data on collectivization is from Kwangtung Province of which Nanching is a part. Assuming that Nanching had not remained an untouched island in the relentless current of collectivization, the analysis of the situation given in these two chapters would apply generally to conditions in this village.

CHAPTER XVIII

Changing Structure of the Village Community

While land reform and its accompanying political measures have wrought changes in the institutional framework of the village community, the influence from collectivization in this respect is far stronger and much more pervasive. This chapter will summarize the major changes in the structural pattern of the village community caused by collectivization.

The most pronounced structural alteration is the functional replacement of the kinship system by the co-operative farm as the core of the village structure. Previously, family ownership of the means of production and the organization of the family as a production team provided the economic foundation for the traditional system of parental authority and the gerontocratic arrangement of status, the strong family solidarity, and the pervasive importance of the family in the individual's private and public life. Now that the process of collectivization has removed land and major farm equipment from family ownership and replaced the family as the basic production team, it is obvious that the family cannot long maintain its status system, its strong solidarity, and its former position of serving a wide range of economic and social functions.

The system of arranged marriage, a vital factor in the cohesion and stability of the traditional family, was to a considerable extent founded upon economic considerations, and the movement of marriage by free choice of partners had so far failed to penetrate deeply into rural communities largely because of the continued submission of the young to parental economic control. But the abolition of the family farm has altered the parents' production role and reduced their financial authority over the young. This seriously weakens the bulwark against the movement of marriage by free choice of partners and the associated influences from the "family revolution." The enforcement of the new marriage law, highly subversive to the solidarity and stability of the traditional family, has found a powerful alliance in the collectivization of the family farm. Thus, with its functions, status arrangement, and the marriage system seriously affected by collectivization, it would be difficult for the family to continue as the core of the village community structure.

However, the development of these effects on the family system depends on the success of the co-operative farm in giving the peasants a stable and satisfactory livelihood. Up till the early part of 1958, large numbers of co-operatives were still in varying degrees of instability and disorganization, and a sizable section of the peasants lived under economic insecurity. Under such difficulties many peasants reverted partially to family production by concentrating on subsidiary occupations and family vegetable plots. It was indeed hard to divorce the tradition-bound peasantry from the time-tested dependability of family economic relationships and the family production roles. Although reduced in importance, the family still retained an extremely strategic position not only as a reliable group in a situation of transitional chaos, but also as a stable group for income management and for raising the young. The labor-unit system of income distribution under the co-operatives reinforced the traditional value of the large family. But any attempt to revive the traditional importance of the family as the center of community structure would be restricted by the insurmountable obstacle of being without land and major farm equipment on which rested the foundation of the traditional family economy.

We have noted the removal of the clan's economic and political functions and the disorganization of ancestor worship so vital to clan solidarity. The collectivization process clearly intensified this aspect of change in the village community. Irrigation and other forms of agricultural work requiring mass labor became part of the co-operative's function, no longer involving the clan organization. Factors which undermine the family system of status and authority, as just discussed, would be even more destructive to the system of status and authority of the clan and its traditional ability to maintain peace and order within the village community. If the confiscation of clan properties and the shortage of public funds during the land reform period had all but stopped the performance of sacrificial rites to the ancestors, collectivization of the village's farms would render the situation irreversible, for the cadres who controlled the distribution of the collective income of the entire village would be most unlikely to assign public funds to ancestral sacrifice which they regarded as superstition marked for eventual eradication. Thus, the clan could no longer continue as the central organization in southern villages such as Nanching.

Turning our attention to the political aspect of the village community, we discern trends of similarly drastic change which began after the Communist assumption of power but became intensified by the collectivization process which united the political and economic powers in the hands of one ruling group on a systematic basis. When the entire village became one big farm under a centralized management controlled by the party machinery which also controlled the village government, the mono-center power structure imposed a routinized systematic economic grip over the political behavior of the peasantry in addition to military and political coercion. Aside from directly determining the income of the peasants, the co-operatives controlled local hydraulic projects that concerned not only agricultural production but also the safety of the community from inundation by floods, distributed welfare funds to families with insufficient labor power to earn the minimum income, lent money to needy cases in the form of loans or overdrawals in excess of one's share of the collective output of production, and by paying surtaxes supported local schools and a variety of public undertakings. When the real power of directing such an organization rested with the same party apparatus which governed the local political order, it strongly reduced the chance for any successful organized dissension to rise from the different economic levels and interest groups. The new situation effectively destroyed the old multi-center pattern of village power structure in which there was no centralized control or formal co-ordination over the local interest groups.

During the land reform period, there was obvious instability in the emerging mono-center power structure as observed in Nanching and as indicated in events happening in villages in many parts of the country. One of the leading reasons was the lack of indigenous party members to form a stable core for the new power structure. Since then, the political order in the countryside has gained general stability resulting from, among other reasons, the vast expansion of party membership. Repeated membership drives were vigorously launched after 1953.[1] Such drives tapped two leading sources of membership among the peasants. One was the New Democratic Youth League, which was renamed the Communist Youth League in 1957 and had 23,000,000 members in that year.[2] With plastic minds and inclination toward idealism and adventure as characteristic of youth, league members were standing candidates for selection as party members. Another source of prospective members were the poor peasants, especially those who had participated in the struggle against landlords during land reform, for they were the ones most dissatisfied with past conditions and looked to the new economic order for salvation. Fed from these two sources as well as from urban workers, the Communist Party attained a national membership of 12,000,000 in 1957. This phenomenal growth was likely to have produced local party members in every village community, including Nanching, and contributed to the stabilization of the new political order.

We have previously observed the replacement of the semiautonomous village community with a functional and structural integration of the village into the national political order. The vastly expanded membership of 12,000,000 in the Communist Party and 23,000,000 in the Youth League, in addition to some 1,500,000 officials in government services,[3] further reflects an intensified change in structural relationship between the village and the national system of government.

In surveying the change in the relationship between the village and the national political order, it is relevant to consider the fact that the party and league members are functionally comparable to the traditional gentry in the sense that both Communist membership and the gentry have a national political consciousness believing in a single ideology, both are intimately related to the national bureaucracy, and both serve as the extended arm of the formal national political power. But the two differ markedly in numerical size and in organizational strength.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, there were about 1,500,000 members in the gentry group in China, giving a statistical average of 2.14 per cent of the population. This gentry group, plus the bureaucracy which filled the some 40,000 official positions in the entire empire, constituted the ruling class for the vast country.[4] Organizationally, the gentry had its local literary societies, fraternal bodies and supporting kinship systems, but as a ruling group, it had no systematic structure integrating the individual members for collective operation on either local or national levels. The small size and the lack of broad organization of the gentry were limiting factors in any effective and close integration between the national system of government and the innumerable village communities throughout the land. During the Republican period, the bureaucracy grew somewhat, but the number of educated rural leaders with national political consciousness shrank, and the integration of the village to the state was no closer than in the imperial times.

In contrast to this, the 12,000,000 members of the Communist Party and the 23,000,000 members of the Youth League add up to a total of 35,000,000. This is 5.83 per cent of 600,000,000, the 1957 Communist figure of China's total population, as compared with 2.14 per cent of gentry in the population of the last century. In addition, the 1,500,000 Communist officials represent an immeasurably larger bureaucracy than the 40,000 official positions in nineteenth-century China. The numerical growth of the Communist ruling group is apparent. Both the Communist Party and the Youth League, as well as the large number of popular organizations under their control, are rigidly structured into a formal system for collective action. It is thus easy to see the relation of the expansion and organization of the Communist political leadership to the closer integration of the village community with the state.

With closer integration of the village community to the state, the Communist political power was being felt by the villagers more intimately than under any previous national political power. With the drastic reduction of local autonomy, the individual freedom of the peasants has been visibly curtailed in many ways. But individual political freedom has not been an outstanding demand among the peasants. To them, the struggle for economic security has been more significant than a quest for political freedom in the Western sense of the term, which has been lacking in their group-minded tradition. It is the problem of adequately feeding the peasants rather than the granting of individual freedom that will determine the stability of the new political order. In this lies the strategic importance of the success or failure of agricultural collectivization.

The economic and political upheavals deeply affected the class structure in the village community through alteration of the economic levels of a sizable proportion of the peasantry. Land reform and collectivization were two forces from the Communist revolution that had the most potent impact on the village community, and both forces had a leveling influence on the old rural class structure. Under the policy of general equalization of land ownership, land reform eliminated the economic status of the whole top class, the landlords and a part of the rich peasants. Most of the landlords were reduced to the poor-peasant status, and some even lost their lives in the struggle. In the few years that followed, a small group of new rich peasants rose from the former rank of poor peasants. They were industrious efficient farmers, after the land reform gave them the principal means of production, land. Therefore, in the post–land-reform village, the rural class structure had rich, middle and poor peasants as before the land reform, but without the landlords and those rich peasants who rented out a substantial amount of land.

With collectivization, the economic status of the rich peasants was depressed through the pooling of their land and major equipment into the co-operative and the abolition of their efficient independent farm organization. As a consequence, there were only poor and middle peasants in the co-operatives that now embraced 97 per cent of the nation's peasant households. A glimpse of this new pattern of class structure may be had by re-examining the case of two co-operatives in Haiyen county of Chekiang Province, mentioned in the last chapter. Table 4 shows the class distribution of the members of these two co-operatives.

TABLE 4

Classes	*Households*		*Persons*		*1956 net income (yuan)*	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Per household*	*Per capita*
Total	*422*	*100.0*	*1,578*	*100.0*	353.1	94.4
Poor peasants	68	16.0	193	12.2	218.3	76.8
Lower-middle peasants	*181*	*43.0*	*621*	*39.4*		
new	59	14.1	209	13.2	291.7	82.3
old	122	28.9	412	26.2	337.0	99.8
Upper-middle peasants	*164*	*39.0*	*734*	*46.5*		
new	32	7.6	142	9.0	436.0	98.2
old	139	31.4	592	37.5	455.9	101.8
Others	9	2.0	30	1.9	184.1	55.2

Any attempt to analyze this sample of class structure is limited by two facts: that the locality represents one of the richest in rural China, and that no standard of income is provided in the classification of the peasants. That the locality is unusually rich may put the percentage of poor peasants lower than that which may be found in other sections of the country; there is no comparable data to check against this possible distortion. However, we can partly overcome the second limitation by taking the lower-middle peasant's annual income of roughly 300 yuan per household or 85 yuan per capita as the absolute minimum for subsistence in this locality — a minimum that leaves a very small margin for comfort or savings against sicknesses, births, deaths, or a poor crop. In the table, the small group of "others" may be merged with the "poor peasants" who were without sufficient food or clothing.

With this in mind, we may say that 46.5 per cent of the collectivized peasantry in this sample had the status of upper-middle peasants, who had an annual surplus of roughly 100 to 150 yuan per household or 10 to 15 yuan per capita for small items of comfort or for meeting crises. Life on this scale may be considered satisfactory in rural China. The rest of the peasants in this sample, 61.0 per cent of the households and 53.5 per cent of the population, were in a range from tolerable living to insecure subsistence. With the status of landlords and rich peasants eliminated, what distinguishes this class structure from the pre-Communist one is that the social distance between the well-off and the poor has been considerably reduced. The leveling influence of collectivization has produced a relatively egalitarian pattern of economic status.

This sample also provides limited data for analysing the vital problem of class mobility under the violent impact of the revolution. The figures show that the turbulent upheavals left a large proportion of the peasants, 60.3 per cent of the households and 63.7 per cent of the population, in their old middle-peasant status. The revolutionary process also brought 21.7 per cent of the households and 22.2 per cent of the population in this sample into the new status of middle peasants. For the poor and the destitute, comprising 18.0 per cent of the households and 14.1 per cent of the population, no indication is given as to whether they were old or new.

There is no information on the origin of the group of new middle peasants. Being in a middle position, they could either have risen from the poor peasants or been reduced from the status of rich peasants. Circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that this new group represented for the most part an upward mobility from the bottom. Rich peasants in pre-collectivization days usually constituted a small percentage of the total village population, and thus could not supply so many candidates for the new group of middle peasants in a downward movement. On the other hand, the pre-Communist stratum of poor peasants was large, much larger than the 16.0 per cent of the households and 12.2 per cent of the population as represented in the sample. Thus numerically they could supply candidates for the group of new middle peasants. Furthermore, the newcomers constituted 38.5 per cent of the lower but only 19.3 per cent of the upper middle peasants, suggesting the characteristic process of step-by-step rise from the bottom. On this assumption, keeping in mind that a few newcomers might have come down from the rich peasants, we may say that some 20 per cent of the village population made their way up to middle-peasant status, while 63.7 per cent successfully cushioned the revolutionary shock and held their old economic status. Many households of orphans and widows which formerly might have been among the middle peasants now sank to the status of the poor and destitute through loss of land to the co-operatives without remuneration and by lacking sufficient "labor power" to draw a middle peasant's share from the collective income. Many former landlords were also depressed into the class of poor and destitute in the downward class movement.

Class mobility of considerable proportion was thus a part of the structural change in the village community. The leading cause in the downward mobility was the abolition of property ownership as a major source of income. The factors in upward mobility were more complicated. A large family with an abundance of "labor power," together with other labor factors such as skill and diligence, could certainly enhance their income and class status. Government scholarships and the many free training classes opened the door of education wider than before as a channel of self-advancement for the common peasant. A new channel of status improvement were the many new organizations, including the co-operative farm, the women's association, the peasants' association, and the Youth League, which supplied a relatively free opportunity for the attainment of local leadership and power for the ambitious and capable who were willing to accept the Communist way of life. The rise in power and prestige of the new elite generally brought them improvement of economic position.

Closer integration of the village with the region and the state and operation of the large collectivized farm required literacy and many types of modern knowledge on the part of local leaders. This new requirement tended to place the institution of formal education in a role of increased importance in the institutional framework of the village community, for both literacy and modern knowledge are transmitted not informally at home and in the neighborhood but formally in the classroom. This institutional change was being effected by many Communist educational measures such as the vigorous campaign to eliminate illiteracy among peasants, increased state subsidy for local schools, granting of large numbers of scholarships to the politically loyal and socially deserving, operation of innumerable short-term training courses for political and economic purposes; all these would compel a change in the relative role of formal education which had only limited significance for the common peasant in the pre-Communist village.

The role of religion in the institutional framework of the village community was likely to continue to decline under collectivism and the increased stabilization of the Communist political order. This would be especially true with collective religious activities requiring financial outlay and political permission from the cadres for mass-organized action. Colorful mass celebrations of religious festivals that formerly were rallying occasions for community solidarity, and large-scale sacrifices to clan ancestors such as those we have observed in Nanching, would have difficulty in continuing owing to control of the village's collective income and large-scale organized activities by the atheistically inclined cadres. Individual worship appeared likely to continue, especially with the older generation and at times of momentous revolutionary crisis when the individual would continue to be troubled by anxiety and uncertainty of situations beyond his control. But the younger generation was growing up under atheistic indoctrination together with a pattern of village life in which mass religious exercises no longer played a vital role in periodically reinforcing community solidarity. The structure of the village was henceforth characterized by its exclusive reliance on secular forces as formal integrating factors, leaving religious activities in an individualized and unorganized form.

In this new structural framework of the village community, there was an apparent lack of a congruent and stabilized "moral climate" or a corresponding system of internalized values in the minds of the common people. The new pattern is imposed by a violent revolution from the urban world and not generated spontaneously from among the peasantry or evolved from a tradition. This means that the operation of the new rural social order could not rely on the spontaneity of the moral conscience, but must depend heavily on political coercion, economic pressures and propaganda devices exercised by the ruling elite. This characteristic of the new system deeply affects its stability.

This seems to be inevitable with a transitional revolutionary situation. The Communist revolution is a gigantic social experiment, sweeping the life of the people into a totally uncharted area in which the fabric of traditional society is forcibly shattered and the familiar paths of life are obliterated. As an experiment dedicated to an unconventional ideal, the revolution must devise momentary measures and expedients to harness the new forces and unfolding situations. The breathless pace of development of the revolution leaves little time for its goals, policies, and measures to develop consistent supportive values rooted in the moral conscience of the people.

The frequent radical shifting of policies as dictated by unexpected developments in a revolution adds further difficulties to the fostering of popular understanding and acceptance of an unfamiliar system of life. The tactics of secrecy and surprise are a function of the underground phase of the revolution, but the continued employment of such tactics after the attainment of formal, open political power serves to demoralize and confuse the people by offering them no dependable rule to follow. To the popular mind, there can be little consistency or stability in a value system in which what is considered a virtue today could be a crime tomorrow.

Although we left Nanching at its land reform stage in 1951, we may be able to infer what subsequently happened there as a reflection of the national process of collectivization and its influence on the institutional framework of rural life, for the broad directions of change have been universal to agrarian communities in mainland China. In this sense, as suggested by the foregoing three chapters, we have seen the traditional world of Nanching being replaced by a collectivized village with a changing community structure lacking as yet in institutional stability.

The village of Nanching as we originally knew it typified a traditional social order which derived much of its high degree of stability from successful institutionalization of group practices in various aspects of social life. The villagers followed these practices as unchanging ways of wisdom conducive to the basic interests of both the individual and the group, and the functioning of these practices relied on a consistent system of values fully internalized in the people's conscience and commanding their automatic conformity. Coercion by the formal government was limited to controlling a small deviant minority. To achieve long-term stability, the Communist system must eventually institutionalize its concepts, values, and basic devices in the operation of the new pattern of life so as to produce a supportive and voluntarily accepted moral order.

What, then, would we expect to find if we were permitted to revisit Nanching in the early part of 1958?

There would be generally the same familiar physical landscape and mostly the same familiar faces, but an entirely different form of group activities would dominate the scene. "The fields, the gardens, the houses, and the ancestral graves," would still be there, but the pattern of community life woven about them would differ significantly from that which we observed when we first entered the village in 1948. The complex lines of earth embankments which divided the village's fields into a huge jig-saw puzzle would be replaced by a continuous open field; gone would be the dirt embankments which traced out a visible geometric design of the family farms and private ownership of land. No longer would we see individual peasants and their families scattered thinly through the fields as they worked. Instead there would be large production teams concentrated in certain work locations. The same houses would still be standing, but the ownership of some would have changed hands. The ancestral graves would still occupy the same hillsides overlooking the village, but the massive ancestral halls that towered above the houses would no longer be the sites of impressive ceremonies and headquarters of an institution which less than a decade ago shaped the pattern of life for this agrarian community. Traditional Chinese regarded "the fields, gardens, houses, and ancestral graves" as the roots of life. Now these very roots of life have been altered by the relentless pressure of a violent revolution; and, although the most compelling factors in the change is the collective organization that turns the entire village into one huge farm, and the new political structure that ties the village closely to a regional and national system of communities, neither has yet become a stabilized system, and the new institutional concepts are neither well understood nor completely accepted by the villagers. We would therefore find the peasants in Nanching in a situation where a return to the old roots of life is impossible and where the road toward collectivization and socialism is fraught with uncertainties.

Postscript – the People's Commune

This study was completed in March, 1958. In April of the same year, the first experimental model of people's commune was set up, and by that year's end, the 750,000-odd agricultural producers' cooperatives had been merged into some 26,000 communes, thus launching agrarian China into another era of revolutionary socio-economic development. This radical and rapid transformation to the commune, now the standard national form of rural community organization, calls for some speculative supplementary comments, although any adequate analysis of this complex problem is beyond our scope.

The majority of the communes at the beginning of 1959 possess these general features: the membership ranges between 30,000 to 50,000 persons; the average area covers an entire *hsiang* (the basic administrative unit comprising a group of villages) and in some cases, the whole county; their functions embrace agricultural and industrial production, trade and other forms of exchange and distribution of goods and services; all types of finance including banking and taxation; housing; public services including group mess halls, nurseries, hospitals and homes for the aged; education from primary and secondary grades to local "colleges"; a military organization which operates the militia and enforces the "militarization of life" in the communes; and local government which is structurally fused with the commune. Thus, under the commune, the individual peasant works exclusively on assigned agricultural or industrial jobs under military discipline, giving up the last trace of private production and private ownership of means of production including vegetable patches the family once owned under the cooperatives; he and his family eat free meals in the public mess halls; he sends his children to the commune nurseries and schools and brings them home in the evening. He is forced to rely solely on the commune for all the basic needs of life and those of his family.

The commune is not only a quantitative extension of collectivization from the co-operative involving greater pooling of land, man-power and financial resources, but more important, it represents an organizational form functionally different from the co-operative. While the co-operative was primarily restricted to agricultural production, the commune has become a multi-functional structure encompassing the entire sector of economic activities, and basic educational, military and political functions. The establishment of the co-operative was a planned alteration of only one part of the economic institution, namely agricultural production; while the alteration of agricultural production had its influence on other sections of economic life as well as other social institutions, such influence took the form of circumstantial pressure for the most part, rather than consciously directed measures. But the development of the commune introduces deliberate, consciously directed alteration of the entire institutional system of the rural community, methodically co-ordinating all major aspects of rural life for the central purpose of increasing agricultural and industrial production and extracting the surplus for economic re-investment and for meeting socio-political requirements of the Communist state.

How does this new development affect conditions in the rural community as once found under the co-operatives? The following possibilities are suggested by analyzing Communist reports on the subject.

Many difficulties in agricultural production which once baffled the co-operative now appear to be obtaining some degree of solution from the unified management of the entire economic institution, and from the over tenfold expansion in the pooling of land, man-power and financial resources. Obvious in this direction is the commune's ability to construct medium and large projects of irrigation and water control so vital to raising productivity of the land but beyond the limited man-power of the co-operative. The former insufficiency of fertilizer seems to see possible solution from large groups working under military discipline to collect farmyard fertilizer and from the increasing volume of chemical fertilizer being turned out by small simple plants now being developed in the communes. Previous shortage of capital and credit required for farm operation and for technical improvements (including mechanization of equipment) may gain some relief from greater pooling of financial resources, more complete control over distribution and disposal of the community's total income, and increased production from the land. Under the co-operative, the peasant's morale, discipline, and conscientious performance of assigned duties was an unresolved organizational problem due to difficulties in transforming the peasant's role conception from a personalized to an impersonalized context. Now, the imposition of military organization and discipline on the commune may bring a temporarily effective solution. Another organizational difficulty of the co-operative, the deficiency in literate, trained managerial personnel, may be alleviated partly by transferring local government personnel, especially accounting and financial workers, to the commune through merger between the local government and the commune, and partly from the feverishly expanding primary and secondary schools and special training courses. The inability of a majority of the co-operatives to solve many of these problems furnished the primary motivation for the development of the commune organization, as explicitly or implicitly expressed in the Communist press.

Under the co-operative, supplementary rural industries had suffered a serious setback in 1957, resulting in a reduction of the peasant's income, low morale among the co-operative's membership, and a contradiction between private and collective interests which many co-operatives had not been able to resolve. The development of the communes may offer a workable solution to this problem by developing local industries from the expanded pool of financial resources and from the militarily organized man-power which can be tapped at will for industrial work during slack seasons in agriculture. With the entire economic sector under unified planning and control, the rural industries are being developed with emphasis on meeting immediate local needs, especially those related to improving agricultural production such as the supply of fertilizer and farm equipment, thus insuring a ready market for the industrial products. Unified management of production and consumption, with emphasis on direct distribution of both agricultural and industrial products to individual or group consumers within the commune would alter the nature of the distribution and exchange system in rural communities by eliminating many traditional lines of retail businesses, by reducing cash transactions and increasing account clearances, and by developing wholesale purchasing and marketing with those outside of the commune, as contrasted to the previous concentration of wholesale trade in large cities.

The general pattern of peasant life undergoes another drastic change from the days of the co-operative. Under the commune system, the effective functioning of the economic and social groups is being obtained primarily by enforcing military discipline, no longer relying on the chance of voluntary co-operation motivated by propaganda or traditionally institutionalized values. The structuring of the work groups in the form of military organizations, the marching in battle formations to agricultural or industrial work sites, the eating in group mess halls, the generally permeating atmosphere of group discipline, all these turn the once placid, rural community into a turbulent military camp in the unprecedented total mobilization of man-power for revolutionary transformation of the vast countryside. The whole group of public services including the mess halls, the nurseries and grade schools, the sewing and laundry teams where they are developed, are deliberate measures to change household chores into specialized collective work so as to facilitate militarization of life and to obtain production labor from women. Any long-term stabilization of such services, together with the distribution of wages directly to the individual worker instead of to the head of the family as practiced under the co-operative, would apparently further weaken the traditional family both structurally and functionally as a basic unit of social organization.

The commune's assumption of educational functions may contribute toward resolving certain difficulties in financing the local schools which, on the one hand, were deprived of their traditional school land by the land reform, and on the other, were not getting sufficient state funds. The co-operatives were devoted primarily to agricultural production and not to educational development. Now that the commune has complete control over distribution and disposal of the collective income, more adequate financing of the rapidly expanding local educational facilities appears possible.

The commune system of remuneration by free supply of certain subsistence items such as meals plus wages graded on an incentive scale would have a further leveling effect on the economic status of the majority of the peasants. Large poor families with limited number of able-bodied laborers, families which remained economically insecure under the co-operative system of remuneration by the amount of labor performed, are now guaranteed at least food and education for their children, and, in certain communes, clothing and other items. Former upper-middle and rich peasants may see their standard of living depressed, but this group is numerically small and probably would not try to rebel partly because of restraint by military discipline now enforced in the commune, and partly because of the traditional fatalistic attitude recently deepened by the rapid succession of overpowering changes in a single decade. On the other hand, the Communists continue to voice against "levelism" by pointing to the differential scale of incentive wages. The greater occupational differentiation in the commune may also offer more opportunity for professional or economic advancement than the co-operative. The administrative complexity of the commune and the development of local industries would create many new lines of administrative, technical and skilled positions.

The foregoing discussions are theoretical inferences rather than empirical statements. Assuming that these inferences are essentially correct, they lead to the larger question of whether the commune as a militarily oriented and functionally comprehensive social system will work and endure. No adequate categorical answer can be expected at this moment when the commune has had only half a year of national existence, when many aspects of its structure and functions are still being experimentally developed, and when even Communist reports carry conflicting accounts. However, some speculation can be rendered on the premise that a workable social system must meet the prerequisites of being able to provide the basic biological requirements of life and to maintain minimum emotional security and personality stability for the individual.

A part of the first prerequisite is the commune's ability to provide the basic subsistence requirements: food, clothing and shelter. These items have always constituted the Chinese peasants' primary goal in their hard struggle for life, and even a minimum satisfaction in this respect would induce at least passive acceptance of the commune system by the majority when any other alternative is forcibly ruled out by political power. With food the most fundamental of life's requirements, the future development of the public mess halls, a common feature among all communes, may be taken as one of the indices to possible success or failure of the commune system. Operating the mess halls adequately in meeting variegated individual needs in a whole community presents complex organizational problems with which the Communists are wrestling hard.

Beyond providing basic subsistence is the matter of inducing psychological satisfaction by offering limited, gradual improvement in the standard of living as reward for the strenuous labor which the peasants are being driven to perform. The pace of work is unusually exhausting even for the Chinese peasants known for their capacity for hard work. It is questionable whether they would long continue to endure the harsh burden without active or passive resistance even under military discipline, should they be denied any tangible improvement in their lives, however gradual or slight. Thus, the granting of such reward, whether by lengthening the list of free benefits or by increase of wages, would be another critical index to the possibility of stabilizing the commune system.

The commune's ability to provide for subsistence needs and limited improvement in the standard of living depends on many factors, among which the commune's ability to raise agricultural output per unit-area is a primary one. High yield per unit-area has hitherto been associated with intensive cultivation characteristic of successful traditional family farms, and the Communist press has never shown consistent evidence that co-peratives were capable of successful collective intensive farming. Hence the decisive importance of the commune's ability to cope with this problem, especially in areas where population density is high and arable land is short. The imposition of military discipline might be giving the commune an edge over the co-operative system, for the Communists have made plans for 1959 to reduce the crop area in ten provinces by 20 to 30 per cent in order to concentrate on intensive cultivation of the "basic farmland," leaving the released land for fodder grass, fruit trees, timber or lying in fallow. Considering that the fallow system has not been a general practice in landshort China, this bold step, if carried out, would indicate the possibility that a degree of success in intensive collective farming among the communes in the summer and fall of 1958 might have given the Communists confidence for the big gamble. The much publicized achievements in irrigation development, increased fertilizer application and deep plowing could have made possible an increase in yield per unit-area.

In addition to the matter of material well-being, the commune has to permit the maintenance of minimum emotional security and personality stability for its members. While we cannot adequately deal with this subtle and complex problem, we can give a brief consideration to the vital example of the changing position of the family. Economic success of the commune, if materialized, could replace the peasants' traditional economic dependence on the kinship system, but could not substitute for the function of the nuclear family in developing the individual's emotional security and personality stability. Husband and wife working and eating outside the home, and entrusting the care of the children to others during the day, had not been uncommon with traditional poor families in the pre-Communist period, and while family solidarity in such cases seemed weaker than in families without working mothers, it was not destroyed. Accordingly, the commune's mobilization of women for production and the setting up of mess halls and nurseries would change the traditional family pattern, but would not destroy the nuclear family, so long as the family members, young and old, remain together when the working day is over. A very different matter is the segregation of husbands and wives into separate dormitories and the boarding of the young in nurseries or schools, permitting them only limited occasions for reunion, for this would threaten the continued stability of the nuclear family. It is not clear how widely this arrangement was ever adopted before the Communist decision to mitigate some of the early extreme measures. As judged from the Communist press, this does not appear to be a common practice in the early part of 1959, for husband, wife and children all seem to live at home when the work day is over. Nevertheless, the changing treatment of the nuclear family relationships constitutes one of the vital factors affecting the possible stability of the commune system.

In the long-term prospect, the commune faces certain additional problems. The commune, with the *hsiang* or county as its boundary, is obviously a much more manageable organizational unit for comprehensive planning and control as compared to central planning and control of the entire vast nation which was attempted in earlier Communist policies. But whether systematic planning and control of a total institutional system, covering all major aspects of life, would prove too complex a task even for the limited local unit of the commune is a question to be answered by future empirical results of the gigantic experiment. Another problem concerns the development of small rural industries to make the commune a relatively self-sufficient unit of local economy. The development of higher efficiency in large-scale plants and in regional specialization of production in certain industries may eventually eliminate many of the small commune industries, if the Communist economy would permit competitive efficiency to perform its selective function. This would turn the present industrial development in the commune into a transitional phenomenon. Finally, there is the question of durability of military organization and discipline as the chief means of establishing effectively functioning groups. It appears that any long-term stabilization of the commune system would have to rely not on military regimentation, but on the peasants' genuine acceptance and the successful internalization of the new collective goal and role conception, a process which will take time and will be guided by the new system's demonstrated ability to adequately meet the physical and psychological needs of life.

There has been a quickening of tempo in the succession of revolutionary developments — from the land reform, the popularization of mutual-aid teams, the "co-operativization" movement, to the establishment of communes the majority of which were set up in two brief summer months in 1958. The accelerating process indicates a growing ease with which the vast population could be re-grouped into new patterns as the individuals were progressively rent from their old institutional ties by the tightening political grip on an increasing number of aspects of their life during the violent decade of 1949–1959. The process may also indicate possible lack of success in each of the drastic reforms to develop a workable social order, thus compelling rapid shifts from one plan to another. Hence we may expect that the commune will not rest long at its present initial form.

Notes

Chapter I. The Village of Nanching

1. George B. Cressey, *China's Geographic Foundations,* New York, 1934, p. 353.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 352.

3. J. L. Buck, *Land Utilization in China, Statistics,* Nanking, 1937, p. 27.

4. Quoted in Cressey, p. 354; see note 1.

5. *Chung-hua Jen-min Kung-ho-kuo Ti-t'u* (Map of the Chinese People's Republic), Peking, 1951, p. 28.

6. See Cressey, p. 355; see note 1.

7. See Cressey, p. 262; see note 1.

8. T. H. Shen, *Agricultural Resources of China,* New York, 1951, p. 21.

9. *Panyü Hsien Chih* (Gazetteer of Panyü County), edited by Liang Ting-fen, Canton, 1931, chuan 42.

10. Shen, p. 97; see note 8.

11. *Ibid.*

12. C. K. Yang, *A North China Market Economy,* Institute of Pacific Relations, New York, 1944, p. 38; Shen (n. 8), p. 109; J. L. Buck, *Land Utilization in China,* Nanking, 1937, p. 353.

13. *Hsin-hui Nan-men Lee-shi Tsu-pu,* re-edited by Lee Peng-chu, 1921, chuan 1, pp. 3–11.

Chapter II. Population Composition

1. G. B. Cressey, *China's Geographic Foundations,* pp. 255, 362.

2. See for example C. M. Chiao and others, *An Experiment in the Registration of Vital Statistics in China,* Oxford, Ohio, 1938, which gives the sex ratio of 111.7:100 for the rural population of Kiang Yin. Also see Ta Chen, *Population in Modern China,* Chicago, 1946, which gives the sex ratio of 103.02:100 for Kunming Lake region.

3. Ta Chen, *ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

4. *Ibid.*, Table 6, p. 84.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–32.

7. See for example the case of Kiang Tsun village described in Fei Hsiao-tung's *Peasant Life in China,* New York, 1939.

Chapter III. The Land and Its Exploitation

1. Fei Hsiao-tung, *Peasant Life in China,* chap. xii.

2. The catty used here is the traditional *ssu ma chin* and not the *shih chin* or market catty, the former still being the standard measure for the villagers.

3. T. H. Shen, *Agricultural Resources of China,* p. 109.

4. Fei Hsiao-tung, *Earthbound China,* Chicago, 1945, chap. i, xii, xxii, and his *Peasant Life in China,* chap. ix.

5. Chen Han-seng, *Agrarian Problems in Southernmost China,* Shanghai, 1936, Table 28, p. 135.

6. Sun Hsiao-tsun, "The Problem of Farm Management in Contemporary China," Part III, *Quarterly Review of the Sun Yat-sen Institute,* vol. III, no. 2, 1936, Nanking.

7. Liu Tuan-sheng, "A Farm Management Study of 3,412 Peasant Families in Chiahsing," *Quarterly Review of the Sun Yet-sen Institute,* vol. IV, no. 2, Summer 1937, Nanking.

8. Chen, Table 25A, p. 133; see note 5.

Chapter IV. Land Ownership and Tenancy

1. Chen Han-seng, *Agrarian Problems in Southernmost China,* Table 13, pp. 127–128.

2. *Ibid.,* p. 32.

3. *Ibid.,* Table 9, p. 126.

4. T. H. Shen, *Agricultural Resources of China,* p. 98.

5. Chen, p. 56; see note 1.

Chapter V. Production, Consumption, and Supplementary Income

1. Fei Hsiao-tung, in his study of the Yunnan villages, maintains that husking reduces the grain by 60 per cent by weight, leaving only 40 per cent of husked rice (see his *Earthbound China,* p. 51). This percentage of husked rice seems too low when compared with the local facts here. Actually, records of rice mills in this vicinity show that unhusked rice sometimes yields over 70 per cent of husked rice, and a net yield of 80 per cent is by no means uncommon. The difference may be a result of the variety of rice and conditions such as the degree of dampness of the grain at the time of milling.

2. Fei, *Earthbound China,* p. 51.

3. This compares with 0.74 in Fei's calculation (*ibid.,* pp. 51, 219).

4. This compares closely with Fei's estimate of 3.7 adults for a family of five (*ibid.,* p. 219).

5. Chen Han-seng, *Agrarian Problems in Southernmost China,* pp. 87–88, and Table 25A, p. 133.

6. Fei, *Earthbound China,* pp. 120–121.

7. Chen, pp. 89–90; see note 5.

Chapter VI. Kinship System

1. See Hu Hsien-chin, *A Study of the Common Descent Group in China,* New York, 1948, and Ch'ü T'ung-tsu, *Chung-kuo Feng-chien Sheh-hui* (Chinese Feudal Society), Shanghai, 1944, for description of the classical principles of clan organization.

2. This system of status is graphically presented in Feng Han-yi's chart; see his "The Chinese Kinship System," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies,* vol. II, no. 2, July 1937, p. 160. Also cf. Marion J. Levy, Jr., *The Family Revolution in Modern China,* Cambridge, Mass., 1949, chap. iii, and C. K. Yang, *The Chinese Family in the Communist Revolution,* chap. v.

Chapter VII. A Decentralized Power Structure

1. For further details see Fei Hsiao-tung, *China's Gentry,* Chicago, 1953, pp. 75–90.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture,* Chicago, 1956, chap. ii.

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2. Yu Lin, "On Revision of the Land Law," in *Chung-kuo Nung-ts'un* (Chinese Rural Communities), vol. III, no. 6, June 1937.

Chapter IX. Class Struggle as the First Step of Land Reform

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2. Liu Shao-ch'i, *"A Report on the Problem of Land Reform."*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

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1. *Wah Kiu Yat-po,* Hong Kong, April 19, 1953.

2. See the summary of these regulations in the *Economic Survey of Asia and the Far East,* 1952, United Nations, Department of Economic Affairs, p. 68.

3. *Wah Kiu Yat-po,* Hong Kong, April 19, 1953, p. 4.
4. *Ibid.,* April 4, 1951, p. 2.
5. *Ta Kung Pao,* Hong Kong, June 19, 1953, p. 2.
6. *Wah Kiu Yat-po,* Hong Kong, April 15, 1953, p. 4.
7. *Nanfang Jih-pao,* Canton, January 3, 1953, p. 1.
8. *Wah Kiu Yat-po,* Hong Kong, April 20, 1953, p. 4.

Chapter XIV. Other Social Institutions and Their Initial Change

1. See the report of Wu Yao-tsung, a Protestant leader, to the People's Political Consultative Conference in Peking, New China News Agency, March 8, 1957.

Chapter XV. From Mutual-Aid Teams to Full Collectivization

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2. "Is There Any Difference between a Higher Agricultural Producers' Co-operative and a Collective Farm?" *Cheng-chih Hsüeh-Hsi* (Political Study), no. 6, June 1956.
3. See, for example, the mutual-aid arrangement among peasants in Yunnan villages studied by Fei Hsiao-tung in his *Earthbound China,* p. 118.
4. *Nanfang Jih-pao,* August 16, p. 3.
5. *Ta Kung Pao,* Hong Kong, March 26, 1953.
6. *Ibid.,* April 26, 1953.
7. *Ibid.,* April 29, 1953.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Nanfang Jih-pao,* Canton, March 24, 1953.
10. Chou En-lai, *Report on the Second Five Year Plan,* delivered to the Chinese Communist Party Eighth National Congress on September 16, 1956. New China News Agency, Peking, September 20, 1956.
11. Liao Lu-yen, "Explanations on Regulations Governing the Demonstration Models of the Advanced Type of Agricultural Producers' Co-operatives," *Jen-min Jih-pao,* June 17, 1956, p. 2.
12. "China's APCs Achieved Great Results in Past Six Months," New China News Agency, Peking, July 4, 1957.
13. *Jen-min Jih-pao,* February 4, 1956, p. 2.
14. Mao Tse-tung, "The Problems of Co-operativization of Agriculture," *Hsin Chung-kuo Fu-nü* (New China's Women), no. 10, October 1955, pp. 2–8.
15. *Ibid.*
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17. "How to Organize Agricultural Labor Power," by Wang Kuang-wei, *Chi-hua Ching-chi* (Planned Economy), no. 8, August 9, 1957.
18. Lu Chih-heng, "The Food Problem and Party Food Policy During the Transition Period," *Liang-shih Kung-tso* (Food), no. 12, June 29, 1956.

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